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WORLD CUP 2018

Countdown to Russia: All the teams at next summer's finals

December 2017

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FROM THE EDITOR

The 2018 World Cup draw dominates our coverage this month. By the time you read this, the eight opening-round groups at next summer's finals in Russia will be known. The countdown has well and truly begun. Suddenly, everything feels real. Travel plans can be finalised, opponents scouted, pre-tournament friendlies arranged.

Last month thoughts briefly turned to those who won't be there: Italy for the first time since 1958, along with continental champions Chile and Cameroon, not to mention Holland and USA.

But now we can concentrate on getting to know the 32 finalists in greater detail.

The challenges facing favourites Germany, Spain and Brazil are obviously vastly different to those of debutants Iceland and Panama. Similarly Peru, back at the World Cup after 36 years, and the returning Senegal, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, have contrasting concerns to those of England and Argentina.

> Suddenly, everything feels real. Travel plans can be finalised, opponents scouted, friendlies arranged

But we aim to provide you with all the essential information and analysis between now and the Opening Match on June 14. Let the countdown begin!

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 England win Under-17 World Cup in India p57
2 Wydad triumph in African Champions League p66
3 Italy sack coach Ventura p68
4 Postecoglou leaves Australia after play-off win p10
5 Peru qualify for World Cup for the first since 1982 ..... p41
6 Renard leads Morocco to Russia p13
7 Senegal confirm finals spot p46
8 Switzerland win play-off with controversial handball p51
9 Croatia and Denmark ease through play-offs p10
10 Malmo win Swedish league title p72

WORLD CUP PLAY-OFFS

Postecoglou quits after Australia play-off victory

Australia will travel to next year's World Cup finals in Russia with a new coach after Ange Postecoglou resigned following his team's play-off win over Honduras, citing the pressures of international management.

"After a great deal of thought and soul-searching, the journey for me ends as Socceroos coach," he said a week after his Australia side claimed their place at the finals.

Postecoglou's decision followed weeks of speculation that he wanted to return to club football.

Gone...Ange Postecoglou

"It has been a privilege for me to coach my country's national team," he said. "To lead them at the 2014 World Cup, to win the Asian Cup in 2015, and now to have qualified for the World Cup next year. I said we would do it and we have done it.

"All this, however, has taken a toll on me both personally and professionally.

"I have invested all I can, knowing how important a period it was for Australian football. It is with a heavy heart that I must now end the journey."

Australia's marathon 22-match qualifying campaign ended successfully thanks to a hat-trick, which included two penalties, from captain Mile Jedinak that gave the Socceroos a 3-1 victory over Honduras in Sydney, five days after a 0-0 draw in San Pedro Sula.

Victory in the Asia-CONCACAF play-off confirmed Australia as the 31st finalist for next

Through...Denmark celebrate winning in Dublin

"In terms of of organisation, we're light years behind Germany, France and Spain. We lack a plan and ideas"

Ex-Italy coach Arrigo Sacchi winces at the prospect of a World Cup without the *Azzurri*

summer. The final qualifying berth was taken by Peru, who beat New Zealand in the South America-Oceania play-off to qualify for their first World Cup finals for 36 years.

A second-half goal from defender Christian Ramos sealed a 2-0 victory in Lima after Jefferson Farfan had opened the scoring for Peru. The first leg in Wellington had ended goalless four days earlier.

The European play-offs also produced coaching casualties, with Italy coach Gian Piero Ventura departing after Italy's shock defeat to Sweden. The Swedes took a 1-0 lead, courtesy of substitute Jakob Johansson's goal, from the first leg in Solna and held out for a 0-0 draw in Milan three days later. (See Diary, page 68.)

Elsewhere in the European play-offs, there was frustration for Northern Ireland after they

conceded a controversial penalty to Switzerland in the opening leg in Belfast. Xherdan Shaqiri's shot appeared to hit the back of defender Corry Evans, who was harshly judged to have handled the ball. Ricardo Rodriguez converted the spot-kick to give the Swiss a 1-0 advantage, which they defended in the goalless return leg in Basle.

Republic of Ireland held Denmark to a 0-0 stalemate in their opening leg in Copenhagen. But despite taking an early lead through Shane Duffy's header in the return, Christian Eriksen led a spirted Danish fightback, scoring a hat-trick as the Danes ran out 5-1 winnners.

Croatia eased past Greece, winning the first leg 4-1 in Zagreb. Luka Modric opened the scoring from the penalty spot as the Croats went 3-0 up by half-time, with Andrej Kramaric adding a fourth in the second half. The second leg proved a formality, with a goalless encounter.

John Holmesdale

HEROES & VILLAINS

LEE DONG-GOOK

Became the first player in the K-League's 34-year history to score 200 goals. His late header helped Jeonbuk Motors claim their fifth title in the last nine seasons.

LAYVIN KURZAWA

The left-back took just 26 second-half minutes to become the first defender in history to score a Champions League hat-trick, doing so in Paris Saint-Germain's 4-0 win away to Anderlecht.

Treble...Layvin Kurzawa

PAUL BASTOCK

The 47-year-old non-league goalkeeper set a new world record when he made his 1,250th competitive appearance in club football, playing for United Counties League Premier Division side Wisbech as they won 4-1 at Thetford Town in the FA Vase.

CHAPECOENSE

One year on from their air disaster en route to the first leg of the Sudamericana Cup Final in Colombia, the team managed to avoid relegation and seal their place in Brazil's top flight.

Survival...Chapecoense avoided relegation this season

Attack... Patrice Evra lashes out

PATRICE EVRA

Marseille terminated the defender's contract after he was suspended by UEFA from European competition until the end of this season for kicking out at a supporter. The 36-year-old was shown a red card before the start of his side's 1-0 Europa League defeat at Vitoria Guimaraes after an altercation with a group of his own club's fans.

TYLER DERIC

Houston Dynamo's goalkeeper was suspended indefinitely by MLS after he was arrested in connection with an alleged domestic incident. The 29-year-old, who was named the league player of the month in October, reportedly head-butted his girlfriend.

NABY KEITA

The Liverpool-bound player was sent off three times in seven games for club and country. He was dismissed for RB Leipzig in their games with Borussia Monchengladbach and Bayern Munich and received a straight red card for Guinea against Tunisia.

Spot of bother... Ovidiu Hategan

OVIDIU HATEGAN

The referee awarded Switzerland a penalty against Northern Ireland in Belfast when the ball clearly struck Corry Evans on the back of his shoulder.

"Germany has changed managers 10 times in the last 90 years. Serbia has changed managers 10 times in the last 10"

Serbian TV commentator Borislav Papi on the sacking of national coach Slavoljub Muslin (left)

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 EMRE CAN
Liverpool v Maribor
Combines with James Milner to cut open the opposition before finishing with a low shot into the bottom corner.

2 ALBERTO DE LA BELLA
Real Sociedad v Vardar
A cross from the right by Andoni Gorosabel is met with a first-time left-footed volley.

3 NAHITAN NANDEZ
Boca Juniors v River Plate
Scores with a sliding volley after Pablo Perez floats a ball to the far post.

4 KEISUKE HONDA
Pachuca v Tijuana
Dribbles from the halfway line, beating five players, to score a wonderful solo goal.

5 MARCELO
Brazil v Japan
A stunning strike that flies into the top corner from just outside the penalty area.

6 ROMULO OTERO
Atletico Mineiro v Coritiba
Chips the keeper from the right-hand touchline, just inside the Coritiba half.

WINNERS

LANUS
Trailing 3-0 on aggregate with 45 minutes to play, they beat Argentinian rivals River Plate 4-3 to reach the Libertadores Cup Final.

ENGLAND
Became only the second nation, after Brazil in 2003, to win the Under-20 and Under-17 World Cups in the same year.

ASIA
Australia, Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia and South Korea are going to Russia, making it five Asian sides at the same World Cup finals for the first time.

LOSERS

SAN FRANCISCO DELTAS
Won the NASL title in their inaugural season but then folded two days later.

PAKO AYESTARAN
The Las Palmas boss became the first coach in La Liga history to lose 11 in a row.

BENEVENTO
Lost 2-1 at home to Sassuolo in Serie A – a 13th straight defeat, to set a new record for the worst start to a season in the top five European leagues

"Football is emotion, errors come with the territory. Players no longer know whether to celebrate a goal or not"

Juventus' German midfielder Sami Khedira argues that VAR is "killing the game" in Serie A

Headliner: Herve Renard

Frenchman guides Morocco to World Cup

Atlas Lions return to finals after 20 years

Suave and charming away from the game, there is a steely side to Herve Renard that has served him well during a dramatic ascent to the top of the coaching game in Africa.

Less than a decade ago, the Frenchman was an anonymous assistant to the evergreen Claude Le Roy, with whom he had first hooked up in China and then spent time at Cambridge United. Now he has qualified Morocco for the World Cup, having already won the African Nations Cup with an unprecedented two different countries.

In between he has managed to convince his compatriots of his ability to also work in Ligue 1, although the manner of his departure at Sochaux and Lille still rankles with Renard, who feels he was not given appropriate time at either. But he has achieved something only one other of the myriad of marginal French coaches who head to Africa seeking to forge reputations has managed: to be hired by a home club on the basis of his work in Africa. The other was Philippe Troussier, but his brief tenure at Marseille was filled with acrimony.

A return to France remains a dream. "Saint-Etienne is the team of my heart, I grew up on the stands at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard," says the 49-year-old, who has extended his Morocco contract until 2022.

After his playing career at Cannes ran short, Renard ran a garbage collection company in his Aix-les-Bains, cleaning offices at night and dreamed of a chance to make a coaching career in football.

A chance encounter with Le Roy, another Frenchman better known in Africa, saw him offered the opportunity to be his assistant with Ghana's national team.

After the 2008 African Nations Cup he became Zambia's coach and took them to the Nations Cup quarter-finals two years later. They were bundled out in a penalty shoot-out by Nigeria, but Renard got a lucrative offer to stay on in Angola as the hosts' coach.

That proved a disappointing tenure but he bounced back in Algeria at USM Alger and had no hesitation when Zambia asked him to return in 2011. Months later they were African champions.

Ivory Coast came calling in 2014 after

> "Saint-Etienne is the team of my heart, I grew up on the stands at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard"
>
> Herve Renard

Renard made a good fist of trying to keep Sochaux up but saw them go down on the final day of the season.

With Ivorians there were many egos to manage and massage in a tough test of Renard's people skills, but Renard worked his magic as they won the Nations Cup, just like Zambia on a penalty shoot-out.

After six months at Lille, Morocco took Renard back to Africa, tasked with reviving their moribund team with his Midas touch. And once again, he has proven capable of the task.

Mark Gleeson

Old pals...with former Ivory Coast defender Kolo Toure at the end of this year's World Cup qualifier in Abidjan

OBITUARIES

Soulama ABDOULAYE (1979-2017) Goalkeeper who won 42 caps for Burkina Faso and played twice at the 2013 African Nations Cup when his country finished runners-up. He played for club sides in Algeria, Turkey and Ghana as well as in his homeland.

Stefano SALVATORI (1967-2017) Italy Under-21 international who won the 1989 European Super Cup with Milan, later helping Atalanta gain promotion to Serie A and winning the Scottish Cup with Hearts in 1998.

Hans SCHAFER (1927-2017) Had been the oldest living World Cup-winner – having been directly involved in two of West Germany's goals in their 3-2 win over Hungary in the 1954 Final – until he passed away aged 90.

Dionatan TEIXEIRA (1992-2017) The former Stoke City defender, who had been playing for Sheriff in Moldova, passed away in his Brazilian homeland after a reported cardiac arrest.

Abubakari YAKUBU (1981-2017) Twice winner of the Eredivisie with Ajax, for whom he made five Champions League appearances.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

International fixtures revolution on the horizon

Prepare for a major restructuring of world football's competitive face. This is not only through UEFA's launch of the pocket-fattening Nations League but also because FIFA is seeking to re-design its own competitive clothing.

FIFA runs nine competitions for men, four for women and the eWorld Cup. It also manages the men's and women's competitions for the International Olympic Committee. All of them, with the exception of the World Cup, run at a loss. This means revenue from the World Cup must support everything else – including the development programme and FIFA administration.

At a time when president Gianni Infantino is handing out more cash than ever, when the major multi-nationals continue to steer clear in the wake of FIFAGate, when two years' thumping losses have been recorded, this does not add up.

Infantino has insisted all will be well once the broadcast and sponsor cash comes flowing in from Russia 2018. But secretary general Fatma Samoura has been trimming costs around the edges – and in terms of staffing – ever since her arrival last year. Now a major review of FIFA's competitions is under way.

Final...Real Madrid (in white) take on Kashima Antlers in last year's Club World Cup Final

> "One option would be, instead of the Confederations Cup, to play a Club World Cup every four years"
>
> FIFA president Gianni Infantino

Suitability and/or relevance to the cold new world is one issue, but cost is another. The Confederations Cup is ripe for the scrap heap, but only partly to avert calendar chaos ahead of the winter World Cup in 2022. Infantino, recognising only too well from his time as UEFA general secretary the onward march of the club game, wants to expand the Club World Cup.

He set out the parameters for the competitions review at the end of the Under-17 World Cup in India – whose success was compromised days later when All India Football Federation president Praful Patel was sacked over election issues.

Infantino said: "We have started discussions on the future of the youth competitions after 2020 with a view to a decision in March. The idea would be to increase the number of participants for boys up to 48 and for the girls up to 24 teams.

"These competitions would be played on an annual basis rather than every two years and there will be one age category, which could be under-18 or under-19. We are looking at co-hosting to give more opportunities to smaller associations to host parts of such a big event.

"We have launched the idea of a women's world league. We need to develop women's football further and recognise there is an increasing appeal for women's national-team football."

How FIFA may manage annual qualifying competitions for the youth tournaments and how small associations – already struggling to finance travel, for example – can afford the extra costs, Infantino did not say.

However, he did have plenty to say about FIFA's eager pursuit of the golden eggs laid by the European club goose, adding: "We have been looking at the club tournaments. We have to look into the future of the Club World Cup and club football in the world – it's not only Europe and South America. So it's good to debate and discuss different ideas and different models.

"The challenge is how and where to fit it into the international match calendar. We would have to look at abolishing some competitions so as to add another one.

"One option would be, instead of the Confederations Cup, to play a Club World Cup every four years so we don't have additional dates. It's an idea. We will discuss it and take a decision in March next year."

Big ideas always go down well with Congress in the year ahead of a presidential election...

FIFA's eternal power games

A fascinating insight into the power battles within FIFA in the inter-war years has emerged as an accidental by-product of an academic debate rumbling on in Germany.

Ahead of the 2006 World Cup the German federation published a celebratory history which aroused criticism for largely ignoring the 1935-1945 era when the DFB had been subsumed into the Nazi system. Hence political historian Nils Havemann was commissioned to right that wrong. This he attempted in *Fussball unterm Hakenkreuz* (Football under the Swastika).

Havemann's work quickly attracted further criticism from other academics who felt he had described "what" without the "how" and "why". The outcome was an answering tome entitled *Hakenkreuz und rundes Leder* (Swastika and Leather Ball) by Lorenz Peiffer and Dietrich Schulze-Marmeling.

Chapters concerning the DFB's pursuit of power within FIFA show that such games at the heart of the world federation are nothing new. Nor is unhappiness with the "one-country-one-vote" system.

A key player in events was Peter "Peco" Bauwens, a former ref and then member of the DFB executive committee. Bauwens was a Nazi sympathiser but his progress up the political ladder was limited because his wife, Elise, was Jewish.

Bauwens worked to promote German football within FIFA, particularly after being voted on to the ExCo in 1932. He proposed that voting strength should be attributed by numbers of registered players at a time when Germany was the world leader in that field. After war broke out, he proposed himself for membership of an emergency steering committee.

The voting idea was turned down by the Franco/Belgian duo of president Jules Rimet and Rodolphe Seeldrayers, who beat Bauwens in an election for vice-president.

Bauwens' later power grab was rejected by FIFA general secretary Ivo Schricker, a fellow German who made no secret of his regret that Bauwens should try to use their long-time friendship to further his political ambitions.

The "weighted voting" concept was raised again by a number of European FAs in the early 1960s, who feared losing control as more and more African and Asian countries joined FIFA.

Plus ça change.

Nazi era ...a German championship game in 1942

No end in sight to Mideast dispute

In January the Court of Arbitration for Sport will rule on FIFA's delaying tactic of removing the Palestine/Israel issue from the congress agenda in May.

As Israel rejects the United Nations' declaration of the illegality of the settlements in the occupied territories of the West Bank, the Israel FA claims every right to involve six settlement clubs in its league system. But Palestine, pointing to UN Resolution 2334, claims that if the settlements are illegal then the clubs are operating without its assent in direct contravention of FIFA statutes.

Disputed...an Israeli league game at the Maale Adumim stadium in the West Bank settlement of Maale Adumin

Critics of FIFA boss Gianni Infantino claim he was influenced by a phone call from Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and by the refusal of European members of the FIFA Council to countenance any action against one of UEFA's own members, Israel.

It may also be reasonable to assume that – when a New York court was launching into its FIFAGate trials and sentencing season – FIFA did not want to undertake any action which might antagonise US politicians.

Whatever Infantino may have said, this will run and run.

PRO:DIRECT

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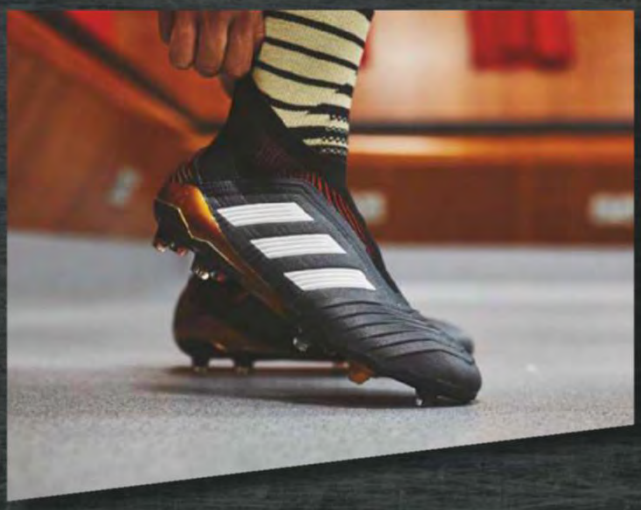

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THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Forceful...Alan Shearer scoring for Newcastle United against PSV

A ban on heading? Surely there's no point

To head or not to head; that was the question pondered recently in a television documentary featuring a thoughtful and objective Alan Shearer, who looked sound and serene, despite the fact that, as he told us, in training when a player he had headed the ball hundreds of times.

Interesting but ultimately irrelevant, since dementia, if it is to set in, will not do so for years, as in the sad case of World Cup winners Nobby Stiles, Ray Wilson and Martin Peters, it has done.

The Professional Footballers Association have announced that they mean to initiate a full inquiry. But what of any use will it tell them? Any more than Peter Crouch, that engaging, towering figure, can know what is in store for him, even if he gives up heading right away.

There have in fact already been medical investigations. Dr Michael Grey, Reader in motor neuroscience at the University of Birmingham's school of sport, has asked for heading to be banned in schools football, as indeed it now has been in the USA. But what use could this be if, when the boy grows into an adult, he finds himself heading like everybody else!

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, to give it its full alarming name, has already engendered two reports, one of which found a direct link with heading when a ball was headed between 1,000 and 1,500 times in a year. Yet another report declared that damage could be inflicted even by 14 headers.

Banned...heading is no longer allowed in USA school football

> It was interesting but ultimately irrelevant, since dementia, if it is to set in, will not do so for years

The depressing truth is that we just cannot know enough.

Some footballers, especially centre-forwards and centre-backs, can clearly go on happily heading for many years without let or hindrance. Take that most masterful of headers, Dixie Dean of Everton and England. I remember meeting him after an England match, decades after he retired and finding him perfectly fluent and functional.

It is all but impossible to imagine football without heading, but given the impossibility of telling during the vast majority of actual playing careers whether damage is being done or not, the only true precaution is to banish heading entirely.

Make all the surveys in the world, and can you imagine that ever happening?

Impressive...Joe Gomez (right)

Youth is the key for Southgate's England

The dazzling success of England's youngsters, in the World Cup played in South Korea, in Toulon and now in India, show how much talent the English game can now produce.

Serious critics have, with some justice, warned that this cannot mean even the best of these excellent youngsters is ready for the full national team and we do know how often even those who have succeeded at youth international level can fall by the wayside.

Yet it was especially encouraging to see how the very young teams which injuries recently obliged Gareth Southgate to field twice at Wembley held out against Germany and then Brazil.

True, England did not score in either game, but nor did they give away a goal. Against Germany, Ruben Loftus-Cheek had an outstanding game. A painful foul by none other than Neymar limited his presence on the field against Brazil, but this is a midfielder, now on loan at Crystal Palace from Chelsea where he has spent so many years, who effortlessly adjusted to international football.

A major positive surprise was the stalwart performance of Joe Gomez at centre-back beside an equally if not more impressive John Stones, alas badly injured in a recent Manchester City game and now out of action for several weeks.

Gomez, who pays tribute to the coaching and the opportunities he had when rising through the ranks at Charlton Athletic, showed not a flicker of uncertainty when plunged into so demanding a game.

And the 20-year-old Dominic Solanke, the refulgent star of a triumphant England under-20 team, might with a little luck have actually, if unmeritedly, won the match for England late on. This is a strong minded young man, who disappointed Chelsea where he had been so successfully developed by deciding to move north to Liverpool.

As we know, Chelsea's excellent youth system produces an abundance of fine young players, but sadly few of them graduate to the first team.

Memories of Matthews, a God-like figure

A new film has just come out celebrating the career of Stanley Matthews. For my generation of schoolboy fans he was a God-like figure and it was reckoned that, post World War Two, whenever he came down with Blackpool to play in London, he would put 10,000 on the gate.

Even in recent days attempts have been made to analyse his famous swerve, whereby he would time and again put an opposing left-back on the wrong foot, before gliding past him up the touchline.

"Don't ask me how I do it," he once pleaded. "It just comes out of me under pressure."

I enjoyed an unforgettable day when, after all those years with Blackpool, he had returned to Stoke City and took myself and the club's then-manager Tony Waddington out to lunch in the station hotel. Ultra experienced as he was, he insisted that: "You must have butterflies," before a game.

The following Saturday, when he made his second official debut for Stoke, I stood beside him before the kick-off in the dressing room and tried to talk to him, but he replied: "I'm not really with you at the moment, Brian."

He did much charitable work in South Africa, helping black youngsters at a time when apartheid infamously oppressed their kind. But no prophet is a hero in his own country, as the Romans told us, and Stanley had been initially discounted at Stoke by manager Bob McGrory, even though they had once before the war been team-mates.

Incredibly, Matthews was eventually dropped in favour of George Mountford, a winger who in 1950 would eventually fly off to play illicitly in Colombia. And so Stanley signed for Blackpool.

The one reservation I would have about his amazingly long career concerns the so-called "Matthews Final" of 1953, Blackpool v Bolton, and Stanley's third and clearly his last attempt to win an FA Cup Final gold medal

This he duly and dramatically did, setting up a couple of breathlessly late goals with his serpentine runs to the goal line. But in all the celebration for his and Blackpool's success, it tended to be forgotten that Bolton's left-back and left-half were limping out of position.

Legend...Matthews in his Blackpool kit

Arsenal's problem with experts

Not suited... Garrincha (left) and Pele

Arsenal have recently been appointing a formidable number of new specialists and behind these appointments is the chief executive Ivan Gazidis, who came to the Gunners from a senior position in the USA.

One of these is the perhaps inevitable new psychologist, at which my own mind goes back to Gothenburg and the 1958 World Cup, when the Brazilians, the ultimate winners, brought their own psychologist, whom I interviewed.

He said he didn't believe in talking to players individually because that might increase their problems. But nor, did he believe in addressing them in groups.

He would strongly advise Vicente Feola, the Brazilian manager, not to pick either Pele or Garrincha as they weren't temperamentally suited to the occasion!

Asked about the psychologist the day before the World Cup Final, Feola spoke, with his interpreter translating: "Senor Feola is not saying he wishes the psychologist would go to hell, but he is thinking it."

Arsenal also appointed a nutritionist. Surely that was always a speciality of Arsene Wenger, who changed players' diets soon after he arrived.

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

"When I watched him play, he was so good that I used to wonder if I should opt for another career. I had nothing in common with him. It was like comparing chocolate with Nutella"

Gennaro Gattuso (left) pays a typically idiosyncratic tribute to former Italy team-mate Andrea Pirlo, who has announced his retirement

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Hungary...new boss Georges Leekens

Hammer time... David Moyes

EUROPE

Out of work since resigning as Sunderland boss following their relegation from the Premier League in May, **DAVID MOYES** is appointed manager of West Ham United. **CHRIS COLEMAN,** who left his role as manager of Wales, took over at Sunderland. **CLAUDE PUEL**, who was dismissed in June after leading Southampton to the League Cup Final, took charge of Leicester City.

Sturm Graz's **FRANCO FODA** will replace Marcel Koller as coach of Austria at the end of the year.

Hungary appointed Belgian coach **GEORGES LEEKENS** on a two-year contract as a replacement for Bernd Storck.

MASSIMO ODDO replaced Luigi Del Neri in charge of Udinese after they lost eight of their first 12 Serie A games. **DAVIDE BALLARDINI** was appointed Genoa coach for the third time in his career after Ivan Juric was dismissed.

Ligue 1 side Rennes appointed **SABRI LAMOUCHI** as coach following the departure of Christian Gourcuff.

CONCACAF

REMI GARDE, who left Aston Villa in March 2016, replaced Mauro Biello as coach of Montreal Impact, while former USA goalkeeper **BRAD FRIEDEL** took over at New England Revolution.

ASIA

PAULO SOUSA took charge of Tianjin Quanjian when **FABIO CANNAVARO** replaced Luiz Felipe Scolari as coach of reigning Chinese Super League champions Guangzhou Evergrande.

Western Sydney Wanderers confirmed **JOSEP GOMBAU** as coach after **TONY POPOVIC** left for Turkish side Karabukspor.

Leading Wanderers...Josep Gombau

New start... Claude Makelele

Makelele takes on new coaching role in Belgium

CLAUDE MAKELELE left his role as number two at struggling Premier League side Swansea City to take charge of Belgian club Eupen, who are owned by the Qatari government.

WORLD CUP

Despite leading their respective sides to next summer's finals, **ANGE POSTECOGLOU** of Australia and Serbia's **SLAVOLJUB MUSLIN** both stepped down. Russia-bound Saudi Arabia sacked **EDGARDO BAUZA** just five games after he had replaced the man who guided them there, Bert Van Marwijk.

EUROPE

Italy sacked coach **GIAN PIERO VENTURA** after their World Cup failure, while FA president **CARLO TAVECCHIO** resigned. **ANDREA BARZAGLI**, **GIANLUIGI BUFFON** and **DANIELE DE ROSSI** all retired from international football.

Holland coach **DICK ADVOCAAT** stepped down and Israel parted company with **ELISHA LEVY**.

Premier League strugglers West Bromwich Albion sacked manager **TONY PULIS**. Technical director **MICHAEL EMENALO** left Chelsea.

OSCAR GARCIA resigned as Saint-Etienne coach in Ligue 1 and **ALEXANDER NOURI** was sacked by Bundesliga side Werder Bremen.

Rangers sacked coach **PEDRO CAIXINHA** after just seven months at the Scottish Premiership side.

SOUTH AMERICA

OMAR DE FELIPPE resigned as coach of Argentinian side Velez Sarsfield after a fan spat at him during a 2-0 loss to Union Santa Fe.

CONCACAF

LA Galaxy defender **ROBBIE ROGERS**, the first openly gay player in any major professional US men's sports league, retired, aged 30.

AFRICA

Belgian coach **MARC WILMOTS** parted company with Ivory Coast.

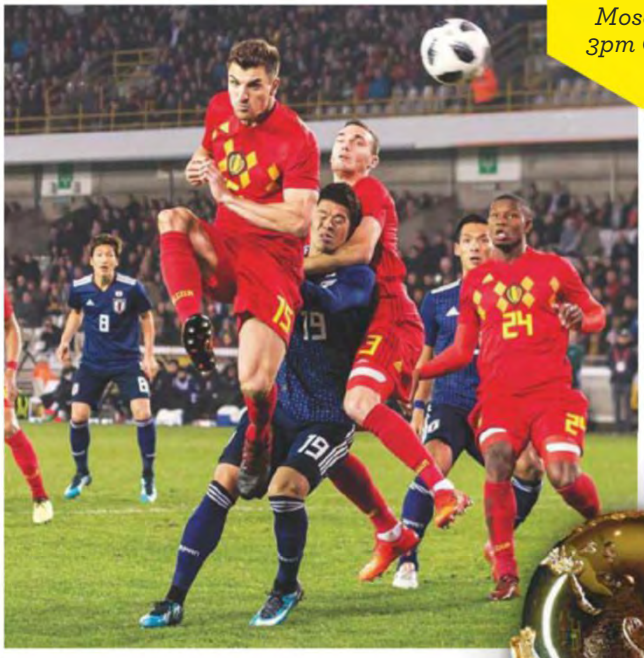
OUT

Failed... Gian Piero Ventura

WORLD CUP 2018

THE TEAMS

Your guide to the 32 qualifiers for Russia 2018



THE DRAW
December 1, Moscow, 3pm GMT

POT 1		POT 2		POT 3		POT 4	
Russia	(hosts)	Spain	(8)	Denmark	(19)	Serbia	(38)
Germany	(world ranking 1)	Peru	(10)	Iceland	(21)	Nigeria	(41)
Brazil	(2)	Switzerland	(11)	Costa Rica	(22)	Australia	(43)
Portugal	(3)	England	(12)	Sweden	(25)	Japan	(44)
Argentina	(4)	Colombia	(13)	Tunisia	(28)	Morocco	(48)
Belgium	(5)	Mexico	(16)	Egypt	(30)	Panama	(49)
Poland	(6)	Uruguay	(17)	Senegal	(32)	South Korea	(62)
France	(7)	Croatia	(18)	Iran	(34)	Saudi Arabia	(63)

Drama all the way

Goal-shy side only just through

From the opening 2-0 defeat at home to Ecuador, to the 3-1 away win against the same opponents in their final game, it was drama all the way in a fraught qualifying campaign as Argentina flirted dangerously with missing out on a first World Cup since 1970. Three coaches were used, and just 19 goals scored in 18 rounds.

KEY EVENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2015** With Lionel Messi absent through injury, Argentina's lack of attacking guile is cruelly exposed as they lose 2-0 at home to Ecuador.
- **Jun 2016** After a Copa Centenario Final loss to Chile, Messi announces his retirement from international football. Thankfully for the national team, he quickly has a rethink and says he'll carry on playing.
- **Mar 2017** Messi is accused of abusing a linesman during the 1-0 win over Chile and banned for four games. He misses the defeat in Bolivia, but then FIFA relent and he is free to play again.
- **Oct 2017** In a must-win game away to Ecuador, Argentina go a goal down after 41 seconds but Messi rescues them with a magnificent hat-trick.

COACH

Jorge Sampaoli, age 57 (13.03.60)
The team's third coach of the qualifying campaign – following on from Gerardo Martino and Edgardo Bauza – he took charge for the final four games. His intense, high press, attacking game was a great success with Chile, and briefly Sevilla, but does he have the players to make it work with Argentina?

THE PLAYERS

Stars In the eight games he missed, Argentina accumulated just seven points. In the 10 in which he played, they managed 21. Seldom has a team been so dependent on one player as Argentina are on Lionel Messi.

Stalwarts Angel Di Maria was one of only two players to start in all 18 South American rounds. Used in a variety of different positions, he had an uneven campaign, but free to float in the last round he combined well with Messi. Although not always convincing, Nicolas Otamendi will hope to take his improved club form with Manchester City into the national team.

Missing Centre-back Martin Demichelis retired during the campaign and defensive resources were further depleted by the knee injury to Ramiro Funes Mori. Dario Benedetto is set to miss out after suffering knee ligament damage in November.

Debuts Although both have plenty of potential, neither Paulo Dybala nor Mauro Icardi has yet made an impression playing for the national side.

Tim Vickery

Hat-trick...Lionel Messi against Ecuador

Floating...Di Maria

S AMERICAN QUALIFICATION

Group	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

08.10.15	Argentina 0	2 Ecuador
13.10.15	Paraguay 0	0 Argentina
13.11.15	Argentina 1	1 Brazil
17.11.15	Colombia 0	1 Argentina
24.03.16	Chile 1	2 Argentina
29.03.16	Argentina 2	0 Bolivia
01.09.16	Argentina 1	0 Uruguay
06.09.16	Venezuela 2	2 Argentina
06.10.16	Peru 2	2 Argentina
11.10.16	Argentina 0	1 Paraguay
10.11.16	Brazil 3	0 Argentina
15.11.16	Argentina 3	0 Colombia
23.03.17	Argentina 1	0 Chile
28.03.17	Bolivia 2	0 Argentina
31.08.17	Uruguay 0	0 Argentina
05.09.17	Argentina 1	1 Venezuela
05.10.17	Argentina 0	0 Peru
10.10.17	Ecuador 1	3 Argentina

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHTEEN GAMES
Angel DI MARIA (18), Sergio ROMERO (18)
FIFTEEN
Javier MASCHERANO (15), Nicolas OTAMENDI (15)
THIRTEEN Lucas BIGLIA (13)
TWELVE Ever BANEGA (10+2)
TEN Ramiro FUNES MORI (10), Lionel MESSI (10)
NINE Gonzalo HIGUAIN (7+2), Gabriel MERCADO (9), Marco ROJO (9)
EIGHT Sergio AGUERO (5+3), Paulo DYBALA (4+4)
SEVEN Angel CORREA (2+5)
SIX Marcos ACUNA (3+3), Emmanuel MAS (6), Enzo PEREZ (3+3)
FIVE Nicolas GAITAN (1+4), Ezequiel LAVEZZI (3+2), Lucas PRATTO (4+1), Pablo ZABALETA (5)
FOUR Javier PASTORE (2+2), Facundo RONCAGLIA (3+1)
THREE Dario BENEDETTO (2+1), Federico FAZIO (2+1), Mauro ICARDI (2+1), Matias KRANEVITTER (3), Erik LAMELA (1+2), Mateo MUSACCHIO (2+1), Guido PIZARRO (3)
TWO Lautaro ACOSTA (1+1), Lucas ALARIO (0+2), Martin DEMICHELIS (2), Augusto FERNANDEZ (0+2), Carlos TEVEZ (1+1)
ONE Matias CARUZZO (0+1), Fernando GAGO (0+1), Ezequiel GARAY (1), Alejandro GOMEZ (1), Leandro PAREDES (0+1), Gino PERUZZI (0+1), Javier PINOLA (1), Emiliano RIGONI (0+1), Eduardo SALVIO (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
7 goals... Lionel Messi
2... Angel Di Maria, Gabriel Mercado, Lucas Pratto
1... Lucas Biglia, Ramiro Funes Mori, Gonzalo Higuain, Ezequiel Lavezzi, Nicholas Otamendi

The unanswered questions

Do they have the players to defend in the way Jorge Sampaoli wants?
There appears to be a lack of defensive pace to push up and play a high line. Without good attacking full-backs, Sampaoli has been using wingers instead – but the problems with such a plan were clear in the recent 4-2 loss to Nigeria.

How can they reduce their dependence on Lionel Messi?
Argentina cannot simply give the ball to their number 10 and pray for him to do something special. Sampaoli must build a side that gives Messi a structure to work in, and which gives the coach options if their star man is injured or off form.

Who is the centre-forward?
Sampaoli rejected Gonzalo Higuain, went with Mauro Icardi, then dropped him in favour of Dario Benedetto. Interestingly, Sergio Aguero only started two games alongside Messi – and they won both.

Two starts... Sergio Aguero

Marathon winners

Long campaign proves worthwhile

Australia's torturous path through qualification encompassed 22 games (the most of any nation in history), 11 different opponents and 250,000 kilometres of travel. They only lost twice, but too many draws meant they missed automatic qualification on goal difference to Saudi Arabia. Four tight play-off games followed, before a fourth consecutive World Cup qualification was secured with a 3-1 home win over Honduras in front of nearly 80,000 in Sydney.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Mar 2017** Ange Postecoglou introduces a new back-three system which is unconvincing in a 1-1 draw in Tehran against Iraq.
- **Sep 2017** Australia rack up 44 shots on goal against Thailand, but can only win 2-1. The same night, Saudi Arabia beat Japan 1-0 to consign Australia to the play-offs.
- **Oct 2017** A report appears in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* claiming Postecoglou will quit after the play-offs, whether the team qualifies or not. Postecoglou refuses to confirm or deny the story.
- **Nov 2017** Australia beat Honduras 3-0 on aggregate to book their place in Russia, but Postecoglou quits his post a week later.

THE COACH

Currently vacant

Ange Postecoglou quit in November despite leading the team to Asian Cup success in 2015 and the World Cup Finals. "This has been a very tough decision for me," he said of his decision to stand down. "All this has taken a toll on me both personally and professionally. I have invested all I can knowing how important a period it was for Australian football." Postecoglou, who won four national league titles as a coach and two as a player, is expected to return to club football.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Aaron Mooy is regarded as the best of the new generation. However, he had a big fallout with Postecoglou after being left on the bench for the second leg of the Syria tie.

Stalwarts Mile Jedinak again proved his worth upon his return from a long injury lay-off against Honduras, hitting a hat-trick in the second leg.

Missing Tim Cahill, now 38, put a question mark against his participation in a fourth consecutive World Cup by claiming he needs "more game time" with Melbourne City if he is to make Russia. Even at 38, he is still a vital cog.

Debuts Matt Jurman made his senior bow on the left side of the back three in the away leg of the AFC play-off against Syria and looked very much at home.

Simon Hill

ASIAN QUALIFICATION

2nd rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	8	7	0	1	29	4	21
Jordan	8	5	1	2	21	7	16
Kyrgyzstan	8	4	2	2	10	8	14
Tajikistan	8	1	2	5	9	20	5
Bangladesh	8	0	1	7	2	32	1

16.16.15	Kyrgyzstan 1	2 Australia
03.09.15	Australia 5	0 Bangladesh
08.09.15	Tajikistan 0	3 Australia
08.10.15	Jordan 2	0 Australia
12.11.15	Australia 3	0 Kyrgyzstan
17.11.15	Bangladesh 0	4 Australia
24.03.16	Australia 7	0 Tajikistan
29.03.16	Australia 5	1 Jordan

3rd rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	10	6	2	2	17	7	20
Saudi Arabia	10	6	1	3	17	10	19
Australia	10	5	4	1	16	11	19
UAE	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Iraq	10	3	2	5	11	12	11
Thailand	10	0	2	8	6	24	2

01.09.16	Australia 2	0 Iraq
06.09.16	UAE 0	1 Australia
06.10.16	Saudi Arabia 2	2 Australia
11.10.16	Australia 1	1 Japan
15.11.16	Thailand 2	2 Australia
23.03.17	Iraq 1	1 Australia
28.03.17	Australia 2	0 UAE
08.06.17	Australia 3	2 Saudi Arabia
31.08.17	Japan 2	0 Australia
05.09.17	Australia 2	1 Thailand
ASIA PLAY-OFF		
05.10.17	Syria 1	1 Australia
10.10.17	Australia 2	1 Syria
ASIA-CONCACAF PLAY-OFF		
10.11.17	Honduras 0	0 Australia
15.11.17	Australia 3	0 Honduras

On their way... celebrating a goal against Honduras

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

NINETEEN GAMES Mathew LECHIE (18+1), Aaron MOOY (18+1)
EIGHTEEN Mark MILLIGAN (16+2), Tommy ROGIC (13+5)
SIXTEEN Tim CAHILL (8+8), Tomi JURIC (11+5), Massimo LUONGO (11+5), Maty RYAN (16), Trent SAINSBURY (16)
FIFTEEN Robbie KRUSE (8+7)
THIRTEEN Mile JEDINAK (13)
TWELVE Brad SMITH (11+1), Bailey WRIGHT (12)
TEN Nathan BURNS (4+6)
NINE Milos DEGENEK (8+1), Jackson IRVINE (5+4), Matthew SPIRANOVIC (9), James TROISI (4+5)
SIX Ryan MCGOWAN (6)
FIVE Aziz BEHICH (4+1), Adam FEDERICI (5)
FOUR Jason DAVIDSON (3+1), Matt JURMAN (4), Tommy OAR (1+3), Josh RISDON (4)
THREE Apostolos GIANNOU (2+1), Matt MACKAY (2+1)
TWO Mustafa AMINI (0+2), Tarek ELRICH (2), Chris IKONOMIDIS (0+2), Jamie MACLAREN (1+1), James MEREDITH (2), Nikita RUKAVYTSYA (0+2), Alex WILKINSON (2)
ONE Ivan FRANJIC (1), Alex GERSHACH (1), Mitch LANGERAK (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
11 goals... Tim Cahill
10... Mile Jedinak
6... Tom Rogic 5... Tomi Juric
4... Mathew Leckie
3... Nathan Burns, Massimo Luongo,
2... Mark Milligan, Aaron Mooy
1... Jackson Irvine, Robbie Kruse, Tommy Oar, Trent Sainsbury, own goal

The unanswered questions

Who will be the new coach?
The most fundamental question of all needs to be sorted out as quickly as possible. As late qualifiers for Russia, the clock is ticking.

Who will score the goals?
Australia create a lot of chances but don't convert enough. Tomi Juric has done a reasonable job, while Jamie Maclaren could be a contender.

Chance...Jamie Maclaren

Will the back three be discarded?
The new system leaked goals initially, although the return of Mile Jedinak helped provide more security. It's a risky tactic against the top teams in the world, although strangely it worked best in the Confederations Cup against the South American champions, Chile.

Will Tom Rogic be able to justify his reputation in Russia?
Alongside Aaron Mooy, Rogic is Australia's most gifted performer, but he has been inconsistent for his country.

Martinez mulls over tactics

Defensive frailties a worry

Belgium qualified from a group where Bosnia-Herzegovina were their main rivals. They scored a record number of goals, 43, while conceding only six. Yet defensive concerns remain and injuries to key players could lead to disaster – just as they did in France in 2016.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2016** Belgium convincingly beat their main rivals Bosnia 4-0 in Brussels.
- **Aug 2017** Roberto Martinez omits Radja Nainggolan from his squad to meet Gibraltar and Greece, which causes a media frenzy.
- **Sep 2017** Belgium beat Greece 2-1 in Athens and become the first European team to qualify for Russia.
- **Oct 2017** Belgium win 4-3 in Sarajevo after trailing Bosnia at half-time. Three days later, Belgium score four against Cyprus to equal Germany's record for goals scored in a qualifying round.

THE COACH

Roberto Martinez, age 44, (13.07.73)

Appointed in August 2016 with a contract running to the end of 2018, he was something of a surprise choice as the Royal Belgian Football Association had wanted a coach with international experience. Although his continental involvement was limited to an Everton run in the Europa League, on the plus side he has extensive knowledge of the Premier League, which is home to half of the Belgian squad, and led Wigan Athletic to FA Cup success in 2013.

KEY PLAYERS

Stars Eden Hazard and Kevin De Bruyne are the top dogs, with Hazard captaining the side and receiving far more freedom under Martinez. But De Bruyne has rarely reproduced his club form and remains an international enigma.

Stalwarts Romelu Lukaku scored regularly throughout the campaign, with other useful goal tallies coming from Dries Mertens and Thomas Meunier. Toby Alderweireld and Jan Vertonghen are the essential linchpins of the defence in front of keeper Thibaut Courtois. Axel Witsel offers stability in front of a back thee.

Missing Vincent Kompany hardly figured in the campaign, while Nainggolan was omitted from the squad for the final four qualifying fixtures.

Debuts Leander Dendoncker made his full debut in the home game against Estonia as part of a back three. Youri Tielemans started his first competitive international against Cyprus in October.

John Chapman

Linchpin...Jan Vertonghen

Deadly... Romelu Lukaku

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	10	9	1	0	43	6	28
Greece	10	5	4	1	17	6	19
Bosnia	10	5	2	3	24	13	17
Estonia	10	3	2	5	13	19	11
Cyprus	10	3	1	6	9	18	10
Gibraltar	10	0	0	10	3	47	0

06.09.16	Cyprus 0	3 Belgium
07.10.16	Belgium 4	0 Bosnia
10.10.16	Gibraltar 0	6 Belgium
13.11.16	Belgium 8	1 Estonia
25.03.17	Belgium 1	1 Greece
09.06.17	Estonia 0	2 Belgium
31.08.17	Belgium 9	0 Gibraltar
03.09.17	Greece 1	2 Belgium
07.10.17	Bosnia 3	4 Belgium
10.10.17	Belgium 4	0 Cyprus

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TEN GAMES
Thibaut COURTOIS (10), Jan VERTONGHEN (10)
NINE
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (9), Yannick CARRASCO (9), Dries MERTENS (8+1)
EIGHT
Eden HAZARD (7+1), Romelu LUKAKU (7+1), Thomas MEUNIER (8), Axel WITSEL (8)
SEVEN
Kevin DE BRUYNE (6+1)
SIX
Nacer CHADLI (3+3), Marouane FELLAINI (6)
FIVE
Michy BATSHUAYI (2+3), Laurent CIMAN (4+1)
FOUR Kevin MIRALLAS (0+4), Youri TIELEMENS (1+3)
THREE Mousa DEMBELE (1+2), Leander DENDONCKER (1+2),Thomas VERMAELEN (3)
TWO Christian BENTEKE (1+1), Thorgan HAZARD (1+1), Vincent KOMPANY (2), Radja NAINGGOLAN (1+1)
ONE Steven DEFOUR (1), Jordan LUKAKU (1), Timmy SIMONS (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
11 goals... Romelu Lukaku
6... Eden Hazard
5... Dries Mertens, Thomas Meunier
3... Christian Benteke, Yannick Carrasco
2... Jan Vertonghen, Axel Witsel, own goals
1... Toby Alderweireld, Michy Batshuayi, Nacer Chadli, Thorgan Hazard

The unanswered questions

What is the Plan B?

By switching to a 3-4-2-1 set-up, Roberto Martinez has shown an element of tactical flexibility that predecessor Marc Wilmots lacked. But while this covered the paucity of quality full-backs, it also revealed the lack of a back-up – which could be essential if Belgium find themselves being overrun in midfield against some of the tournament favourites.

Frustrating... Kevin De Bruyne

Can Vincent Kompany and Thomas Vermaelen be relied upon in Russia?

The success of Martinez's back three depends on the form and fitness of Kompany, or as back-up, Vermaelen. Other candidates, such as Laurent Ciman and Dedryck Boyota, are short of international quality.

Will Radja Nainggolan return?

Martinez has never had a smooth relationship with Nainggolan, who offers a physicality that's lacking in Belgium's midfield. After injury forced him out of recent friendlies against Japan and Mexico, Nainggolan has little time to convince Martinez that he is needed.

Will Kevin De Bruyne shine on the world stage?

De Bruyne has openly criticised Martinez's tactics – which is probably a sign of his frustration at the fact that he has rarely looked happy on the international stage. He thrives on responsibility and it could be that this has been in short supply when he has worn a Belgium shirt.

Tite turns it round

New coach inspires Neymar and team-mates

A desperate struggle – Brazil were down in sixth place with a third of the campaign gone – turned into a triumphant and exhilarating victory parade from the moment that Tite replaced Dunga as coach. Following the new coach's appointment, Brazil then put together 10 wins and two draws to seal their place in Russia next summer with four rounds to spare. Question marks remain over the team's temperament, particularly that of Neymar. Against Ecuador he was over-concerned with drawing fouls and a routine game became a tense occasion. He lost control, picked up a yellow card for a crude foul and missed four games through suspension. It remains to be seen whether he or others explode under pressure.

THE COACH

Tite, age 56 (25.05.61)
Appointed in June 2016, he is an intelligent and charismatic figure who won domestic, continental and world titles with Corinthians before taking time off to carry out an in-depth study of top-class European football.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Coming into his peak years, Neymar is full of dazzling improvisation at pace and is a constant threat. Providing he can keep his head, this World Cup could be his tournament.
Stalwarts Paulinho was a controversial recall, but Tite is well aware of his virtues from their time together at Corinthians.

S AMERICAN QUALIFICATION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

08.10.15	Chile 2	**0 Brazil**
13.10.15	**Brazil 3**	1 Venezuela
13.11.15	Argentina 1	**1 Brazil**
17.11.15	**Brazil 3**	0 Peru
25.03.16	**Brazil 2**	2 Uruguay
29.03.16	Paraguay 2	**2 Brazil**
01.09.16	Ecuador 0	**3 Brazil**
06.09.16	**Brazil 2**	1 Colombia
06.10.16	**Brazil 5**	0 Bolivia
11.10.16	Venezuela 0	**2 Brazil**
10.11.16	**Brazil 3**	0 Argentina
15.11.16	Peru 0	**2 Brazil**
23.03.17	Uruguay 1	**4 Brazil**
28.03.17	**Brazil 3**	0 Paraguay
31.08.17	**Brazil 2**	0 Ecuador
05.09.17	Colombia 1	**1 Brazil**
05.10.17	Bolivia 0	**0 Brazil**
10.10.17	**Brazil 3**	0 Chile

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Jun 2016** Failure to get out of the group stage of the Copa Centenario saw coach Dunga lose his job and Tite come in as his replacement.
- **Sep 2016** Tite's first game, away to Ecuador, was a nervy affair. The game was goalless with 20 minutes to go and Brazil would have probably taken a draw at that point. But debutant Gabriel Jesus forced a penalty, soon after the hosts had a man sent off and the *Selecao* went on to win 3-0.
- **Nov 2016** A goal up at home to Argentina, Lionel Messi was looking dangerous for the visitors until, on the stroke of half-time, Jesus played a reverse ball into the path of Neymar, who put the game beyond their rivals' reach.
- **Mar 2017** Brazil did show they may have resolve as well as talent by winning 4-1 in Uruguay after going a goal behind.

Rivals...Neymar celebrates scoring against Argentina

Debuts Gabriel Jesus came in and immediately solved Brazil's centre-forward problem, scoring seven goals despite only starting half the games. But will he be jaded after a first full season in the Premier League? The appearance of goalkeeper Ederson in the final game may be telling.

Tim Vickery

Goals...Gabriel Jesus

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

SEVENTEEN GAMES
Dani ALVES (17), MIRANDA (17)
SIXTEEN
ALISSON (16), Renato AUGUSTO (15+1), WILLIAN (11+5)
FOURTEEN
MARQUINHOS (12+2), NEYMAR (14)
THIRTEEN
Philippe COUTINHO (8+5)
ELEVEN
PAULINHO (11)
TEN
FERNANDINHO (7+3), Gabriel JESUS (9+1)
NINE
FILIPE LUIS (9)
SEVEN
CASEMIRO (7), Douglas COSTA (5+2), Lucas LIMA (1+6), MARCELO (7)
SIX
Roberto FIRMINO (3+3), Luiz GUSTAVO (6)
FIVE
Ricardo OLIVEIRA (3+2), Thiago SILVA (2+3)
FOUR
ELIAS (4)
THREE
GIL (2+1), GIULIANO (1+2), DAVID LUIZ (3), OSCAR (2+1)
TWO
HULK (1+1), Alex SANDRO (2), Douglas SOUZA (0+2), TAISON (0+2)
ONE
Rodrigo CAIO (0+1), EDERSON (1), FAGNER (1), JEFFERSON (1), JONAS (0+1), KAKA (0+1), LUAN (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
7 goals...Gabriel Jesus
6... Neymar, Paulinho
4... Philippe Coutinho, Willian
3... Renato Augusto
2... Douglas Costa, Filipe Luis, Ricardo Oliveira
1... Dani Alves, Roberto Firmino, Lucas Lima, Marcelo, Miranda

The unanswered questions

Have they been truly tested yet?
Tite's team were magnificent against a disappointing crop of South American rivals, but stiffer tests lie ahead. That point was illustrated by the collapse of Argentina's defence against Nigeria on the same day Brazil were held by an inexperienced England side.

Would the side benefit from appointing a permanent captain?
Without a natural candidate for the role of on-field leader, Tite has been choosing a different skipper for every match and plans to continue doing so in Russia. Brazil sides have often been at their best with a vocal leader.

Attacking...Marcelo

Can they cover the vulnerable space behind the full-backs?
Both Dani Alves and Marcelo are rampaging attacking full-backs but neither is great defensively. Opponents will surely seek to probe the space they leave behind them.

Big squad but little spark

Pekerman still searching for best team

S AMERICAN QUALIFICATION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

Since making their World Cup quarter-finals debut in 2014, Colombia have been consistently disappointing, and their qualification campaign for Russia was a laboured, uninspired affair with few high points from a group of players who would seem to be capable of better.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2015** Abandoning midfield elaboration for a more direct game plan by playing straight up to the front three, a 1-1 draw in Chile sees the hosts drop points for the first time.
- **Mar 2016** After taking just four points from their first four games, Colombia let slip a two-goal lead before finding a late winner to triumph 3-2 away to Bolivia – a notoriously difficult fixture in which Uruguay were the only other team to have left with all three points.
- **Nov 2016** With seven changes to the side, Colombia suffer a huge blow to their confidence with a 3-0 thrashing in Argentina.
- **Oct 2017** Two late Paraguay goals in a 2-1 defeat almost derail Colombia's qualification hopes, but they salvage things with a 1-1 draw in Peru five days later.

THE COACH

Jose Pekerman, age 68 (03.09.49)
Appointed at the start of 2012, he made his name as a highly successful coach of the national under-20s in his native Argentina at the turn of the century, and then took the senior side to the 2006 World Cup.

THE PLAYERS

Stars The big star of 2014, James Rodriguez has had an uneasy time at club level since his golden tournament, but he clearly relishes being important to the national team and was the team's top scorer in qualifying.
Stalwarts Defensive midfielder Carlos Sanchez is a man-marking specialist whose positional sense and timing in the tackle balance out the side.
Debuts Gifted but wayward attacking midfielder Edwin Cardona was the most important member of the post-2014 intake, alongside Yerry Mina, the giant centre-half who came into the team for the second half of the campaign and adds pace on the ground to an aerial dominance.

Tim Vickery

08.10.15	Colombia 2	0 Peru
13.10.15	Uruguay 3	0 Colombia
12.11.15	Chile 1	1 Colombia
17.11.15	Colombia 0	1 Argentina
24.03.16	Bolivia 2	3 Colombia
29.03.16	Colombia 3	1 Ecuador
01.09.16	Colombia 2	0 Venezuela
06.09.16	Brazil 2	1 Colombia
06.10.16	Paraguay 0	1 Colombia
11.10.16	Colombia 2	2 Uruguay
10.11.16	Colombia 0	0 Chile
15.11.16	Argentina 3	0 Colombia
23.03.17	Colombia 1	0 Bolivia
28.03.17	Ecuador 0	2 Colombia
31.08.17	Venezuela 0	0 Colombia
05.09.17	Colombia 1	1 Brazil
05.10.17	Colombia 1	2 Paraguay
10.10.17	Peru 1	1 Colombia

Routine...celebrating a goal against Bolivia

Important..Rodriguez

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHTEEN GAMES David OSPINA (18)
FIFTEEN Juan CUADRADO (13+2), Carlos SANCHEZ (15)
FOURTEEN Edwin CARDONA (8+6)
THIRTEEN Santiago ARIAS (13), Carlos BACCA (10+3), James RODRIGUEZ (13)
TEN Luis MURIEL (6+4), Cristian ZAPATA (10)
NINE Oscar MURILLO (9)
EIGHT Abel AGUILAR (7+1), Farid DIAZ (8), Frank FABRA (8), Radamel FALCAO (5+3), Jeison MURILLO (8), Macnelly TORRES (5+3)
SEVEN Daniel TORRES (6+1)
SIX Wilmar BARRIOS (4+2)
FIVE Tefilo GUTIERREZ (3+2), Yerry MINA (5)
FOUR Yimmi CHARA (1+3), Alexander MEJIA (2+2), Davinson SANCHEZ (4)
THREE Orlando BERRIO (1+2), Roger MARTINEZ (0+3), Stefan MEDINA (3), Marlos MORENO (0+3)
TWO Miguel BORJA (2), Fabian CASTILLO (0+2), Fredy GUARIN (2), Giovanni MORENO (0+2), Sebastian PEREZ (2), Adrian RAMOS (0+2), Mateus URIBE (1+1), Duvan ZAPATA (1+1)
ONE Pablo ARMERO (1), Eder BALANTA (1), Jonathan CAPOTE (0+1), Guillermo CELIS (1), Gustavo CUELLAR (0+1), Jackson MARTINEZ (1), Helibelton PALACIOS (1), Edgar PARDO (0+1), Luis QUINONES (0+1), William TESILLO (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
6 goals... James Rodriguez
3... Carlos Bacca, Edwin Cardona
2... Radamel Falcao
1... Abel Aguilar, Juan Cuadrado, Teofilo Gutierrez, Yerry Mina, Sebastian Perez, Macnelly Torres, own goal

The unanswered questions

Can they trust David Ospina?
With the exception of a meaningless Copa Centenario group game, it is more than six years since anyone but Ospina has started a competitive match in goal for Colombia. But inactivity at Arsenal may have taken its toll and he ended the campaign in calamitous fashion. Two candidates to replace him were blooded in November, so will he still get the nod?

Trust...David Ospina

How will Radamel Falcao be used?
Pekerman has rarely trusted Falcao to play up front on his own, with Duvan Zapata playing alongside him in the final qualifier. If they are to play two up front, a creative midfielder will be sacrificed.

Will past experience?
Several of the squad played their way through to the 2014 World Cup quarter-finals, the 2015 Copa America quarter-finals and the 2016 Copa Centenario semi-finals. Experience might just help them hang in there and grind out results.

Another shock looks unlikely

The surprise side of 2014 are back again

After a qualifying phase with its fair share of ups and downs, and some very disappointing results in the latest friendlies, there's a fear in Costa Rica that the team is not up to the standards they set in Brazil 2014 and that their "golden generation" has already seen its best years pass. The team qualified with two games to spare, but their only victories in the CONCACAF Hexagonal were against the two teams that didn't even make the play-offs: USA and Trinidad &Tobago.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** A great start to the final qualifying round, with victories away to Trinidad & Tobago (2-0) and at home to the USA (4-0). However, they would be the only teams they would beat in the tournament.
- **Mar 2017** A 2-0 defeat in Mexico and a 1-1 draw away to Honduras put the team second in the group.
- **Sep 2017** Two goals from Marcos Urena earn Costa Rica a first-ever win in the United States.
- **Oct 2017** Costa Rica qualify for a second consecutive World Cup but the success has a bitter-sweet flavour as it comes on the back of a three-match winless streak.

THE COACH

Oscar Ramirez, age 52 (08.12.64) Appointed in October 2015, after previous coach Paulo Wanchope resigned, "The Machillo" was a standout midfielder and part of the Costa Rica side that played at the 1990 World Cup. After his retirement he became technical assistant at Saprissa and the national team, and was then coach of Santos de Guapiles and Alajuelense – where he won five league titles.

THE PLAYERS

Stars For some time Costa Rica have relied on their three European-based stars: Keylor Navas, Bryan Ruiz and Joel Campbell. Today, just one is a starter in an elite team, while the loss of form and injuries mean the other two have struggled to play regularly.

Stalwarts Many of those who surprised the world in Brazil 2014 have kept their place in the squad. Giancarlo Gonzalez, Oscar Duarte, Celso Borges, Yeltsin Tejeda, Christian Bolanos and Marcos Urena form an experienced backbone.

Missing Striker Alvaro Saborio, who missed Brazil 2014 with injury, retired from international football in 2016.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

Determined... David Guzman (right) and Ronald Matarrita keep out Panama

Europe-based...Navas

CONCACAF QUALIFICATION

4th rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	5	1	0	11	3	16
Panama	6	3	1	2	7	5	10
Haiti	6	1	1	4	2	4	4
Jamaica	6	1	1	4	2	10	4

13.11.15	Costa Rica 1	0 Haiti
17.11.15	Panama 1	2 Costa Rica
25.03.16	Jamaica 1	1 Costa Rica
29.03.16	Costa Rica 3	0 Jamaica
02.09.16	Haiti 0	1 Costa Rica
06.09.16	Costa Rica 3	1 Panama

Fifth Round	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	10	6	3	1	16	7	21
Costa Rica	10	4	4	2	14	8	16
Panama	10	3	4	3	9	10	13
Honduras	10	3	4	3	13	19	13
USA	10	3	3	4	17	13	12
Trinidad & Tobago	10	2	0	8	7	19	6

11.11.16	Trinidad & T 0	2 Costa Rica
15.11.16	Costa Rica 4	0 USA
24.03.17	Mexico 2	0 Costa Rica
28.03.17	Honduras 1	1 Costa Rica
08.06.17	Costa Rica 0	0 Panama
13.06.17	Costa Rica 2	1 Trinidad & T
01.09.17	USA 0	2 Costa Rica
05.09.17	Costa Rica 1	1 Mexico
07.10.17	Costa Rica 1	1 Honduras
10.10.17	Panama 2	1 Costa Rica

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

FIFTEEN GAMES
Celso BORGES (15), Bryan RUIZ (15)
FOURTEEN
Christian BOLANOS (10+4), Marcos URENA (10+4)
THIRTEEN
Johnny ACOSTA (13), Cristian GAMBOA (13), Johan VENEGAS (7+6)
TWELVE
Kendall WASTON (12), Joel CAMPBELL (8+4)
ELEVEN
Keylor NAVAS (11), Randall AZOFEIFA (9+2)
TEN
Ronald MATARRITA (9+1), David GUZMAN (4+6)
EIGHT
Giancarlo GONZALEZ (7+1)
SEVEN
Francisco CALVO (7), Bryan OVIEDO (7)
SIX
Oscar DUARTE (5+1)
FIVE
Michael UMANA (2+3)
FOUR
Patrick PEMBERTON (4), Alvaro SABORIO (1+3), Rodney WALLACE (1+3)
THREE Jose SALVATIERRA (2+1)
TWO Daniel COLINDRES (0+2), Junior DIAZ (0+2), Yeltsin TEJEDA (0+2)
ONE Esteban ALVARADO (1), Oscar GRANADOS (1), Kenner GUTIERREZ (1), Allan MIRANDA (1), Yendrick RUIZ (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
4 goals... Christian Bolanos, Marco Urena
3... Bryan Ruiz, Johan Venegas
2... Joel Campbell, Ronald Matarrita, Kendall Waston
1... Johnny Acosta, Randall Azofeifa, Celso Borges, Francisco Calvo, Cristian Gamboa

The unanswered questions

Will the stars be back on time?
Joel Campbell and Bryan Ruiz were both going through rough patches of form before getting injuries. They have been instrumental for Costa Rica in recent years.

Where is the generational change?
It was hoped that players such as Jimmy Marin, Randall Leal and Gerson Torres, all aged 20, would make the step up to the senior team, but they do not seem to be remotely close to doing so.

Defeat...losing in a friendly to Spain

Is it possible to reverse the recent run of bad form?
Although no one expected Costa Rica to perform as they did in Brazil, it was clear that the team had a positive momentum in the build-up to the tournament, which is not the case this time. They have not played well in recent matches and the friendly defeats against Spain (5-0) and Hungary (1-0) are worrying.

Inconsistent campaign

Play-off specialists triumph again

After reaching the 1998 and 2014 finals via the play-offs, Croatia again had to book their ticket at the eleventh hour – although they were never in any danger of coming unstuck against Greece. A thoroughly inconsistent route march all in all: one moment, sublime, the next, downright careless.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** Marcelo Brozovic scores both goals in a 2-0 win against Iceland. The game was one of two Croatia qualifiers played behind closed doors as punishment for "discriminatory chants" by supporters.
- **Jun 2017** A 1-0 loss in Iceland is the moment the wheels start to come off. From beginning to end, a flat and ineffective display in which they conceded in the 90th minute.
- **Oct 2017** After a draw at home to Finland, coach Ante Cacic is replaced with former under-21 assistant Zlatko Dalic. In his first game at the helm, Dalic steers the side to a 2-0 win in Ukraine to secure a play-off berth.
- **Nov 2017** Specialists in head-to-head eliminators – Croatia boast a five out of five record in World Cup and Euro play-offs – they are too hot for Greece to handle, winning 4-1 on aggregate.

THE COACH

Zlatko Dalic, age 51 (26.10.66)
Appointed caretaker in October 2017 and given the job permanently in November 2017, having spent five years (2006-11) on the Croat under-21 staff under Drazen Ladic. As head coach, he has been in charge of Croat outfits Varteks Varazdin, Rijeka and Slaven Belupo, plus clubs in Albania (Dinamo Tirana) and the Gulf (Al Faisaly Harmah, Al Hilal and Al Ain).

THE PLAYERS

Stars The incomparable Luka Modric took over as skipper from Darijo Srna at the start of last season.
Stalwarts As headstrong as he is talented, Mario Mandzukic is an all-day headache for defenders. Ivan Rakitic is an industrious, creative midfielder.
Missing Centre-back Vedran Corluka has been out for several months after rupturing an Achilles tendon.
Debuts An outstanding attacking midfield prospect, Nikola Vlasic made his competitive bow against Greece.

Nick Bidwell

Success...Andrej Kramaric (no9) celebrates his goal against Ukraine

Headstrong... Mario Mandzukic

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iceland	10	7	1	2	16	7	22
Croatia	10	6	2	2	15	4	20
Ukraine	10	5	2	3	13	9	17
Turkey	10	4	3	3	14	13	15
Finland	10	2	3	5	9	13	9
Kosovo	10	0	1	9	3	24	1

05.09.16	Croatia 1	1 Turkey
06.10.16	Kosovo 0	6 Croatia
09.10.16	Finland 0	1 Croatia
12.11.16	Croatia 2	0 Iceland
24.03.17	Croatia 1	0 Ukraine
11.06.17	Iceland 1	0 Croatia
02.09.17	Croatia 1	0 Kosovo
05.09.17	Turkey 1	0 Croatia
06.10.17	Croatia 1	1 Finland
09.10.17	Ukraine 0	2 Croatia
PLAY-OFFS		
09.11.17	Croatia 4	1 Greece
12.11.17	Greece 0	0 Croatia

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TWELVE GAMES
Domagoj VIDA (12)
ELEVEN
Marcelo BROZOVIC (9+2), Andrej KRAMARIC (5+6)Mario MANDZUKIC (10+1), Ivan PERISIC (11)
TEN
Luka MODRIC (9+1), Danijel SUBASIC (10), Sime VRSALJKO (10)
NINE
Milan BADELJ (8+1), Nikola KALINIC (5+4), Josip PIVARIC (8+1)
EIGHT
Ivan RAKITIC (8)
SEVEN
Mateo KOVACEVIC (6+1)
SIX Dejan LOVREN (6), Matej MITROVIC (4+2)
FIVE
Marko ROG (0+5)
FOUR
Duje COP (0+4)
THREE
Vedran CORLUKA (3), Mario PASALIC (0+3), Ivan STRINIC (3)
TWO Tin JEDVAJ (2), Lovre KALINIC (2), Ante REBIC (0+2)
ONE
Marko PJACA (1), Ivan SANTINI (0+1), Nikola VLASIC (0+1)

GOALSCORERS IN QUALIFIERS
5 goals... Mario Mandzukic
3... Nikola Kalinic, Andrej Kramaric
2... Marcelo Brozovic, Ivan Perisic
1... Matej Mitrovic, Luka Modric, Ivan Rakitic, Domagoj Vida

The Unanswered Questions

Could Luka Modric be affected by his loss of popularity back home?
Many Croat fans were unimpressed when he sensationally retracted his original testimony at the corruption trial of one-time Dinamo Zagreb chief Zdravko Mamic. The latter is very much a hate figure in the country and, with Modric appearing to side with him, the abuse of the Real Madrid ace has been considerable.

Abuse...Luka Modric

After creating havoc at Euro 2016, have the Croat fans calmed down?
Far from it. Their hardcore supporters remain fiercely opposed to the powers-that-be at the football federation and are adamant that president Davor Suker – once a prolific international striker – and his cohorts are corrupt.

Who is the side's unsung hero?
Defensive midfielder Milan Badelj is the one who takes care of the dirty work and allows the likes of Modric and Ivan Rakitic to play.

Which areas of the pitch should concern coach Dalic the most?
In the absence of Marko Pjaca, Ivan Perisic is the squad's only classic winger. Andrej Kramaric can do a job on the right but he is much more of a threat through the middle. Nikola Vlasic or Ante Rebic might be an incisive solution on that side.

Which uncapped players have a chance of going to the World Cup?
Defenders Antonio Milic and Duje Caleta-Car are in with a shout.

Eriksen leads the way

Midfield star can shine on the world stage

Denmark's qualifying campaign was a crescendo, starting abysmally as new coach Age Hareide struggled to impose his ideas, but rising to the brilliance of a 5-1 away triumph in the concluding play-off game. It is surely the best trajectory towards the nation's fifth World Cup finals. While this side do not possess the vivid quality of the 1986 "Dynamite" team or the 1998 side that reached the quarter-finals, in Christian Eriksen they have a player every opponent will respect and fear. Optimism is high in a happy squad of underdogs who believe they can cause some shocks at the tournament as the most accomplished of the Scandinavian trio of nations.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** The team is jeered off the pitch after a 1-0 home defeat by Montenegro.
- **Sept 2017** A 4-0 win at home to Poland is a huge confidence boost for the side and evidence of quality as well as spirit.
- **Oct 2017** Christian Eriksen scores the only goal of the game in a revenge away victory to Montenegro.
- **Nov 2017** Trailing 1-0 to the Republic of Ireland in the final play-off, Eriksen's hat-trick sees Denmark to victory.

THE COACH

Age Hareide, age 64 (23.09.53)
Was a surprise choice to replace long-serving Morten Olsen in March 2016, not only because he is Norwegian but also given his relative lack of success as coach of his homeland a decade ago. Widespread scepticism among the army of high-profile Danish pundits from the Dynamite years has been washed away by a superb run of results in 2017, culminating in qualification. Nobody doubts now that he is worth his contract until July 2020.

PLAYERS

Stars The talisman of the team is midfielder Christian Eriksen, who scored an incredible 11 goals in the qualifying campaign, including the hat-trick in the final play-off match. He has blossomed into world class under the guidance of club manager Mauricio Pochettino at Tottenham Hotspur and is now happy and able to accept the responsibility of inspiring the team. Winger Pione Sisto has been a revelation in the past few months.

Stalwarts Keeper Kasper Schmeichel is following in the footsteps of his famous father, Peter, while midfielder William Kvist remains a valuable operator.

Jim Holden

Hat-trick hero... Christian Eriksen

Following dad... Kasper Schmeichel

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	10	8	1	1	28	14	25
Denmark	10	6	2	2	20	8	20
Montenegro	10	5	1	4	20	12	16
Romania	10	3	4	3	12	10	13
Armenia	10	2	1	7	10	26	7
Kazakhstan	10	0	3	7	6	26	3

04.09.16	Denmark 1	0 Armenia
08.10.16	Poland 3	2 Denmark
11.10.16	Denmark 0	1 Montenegro
11.11.16	Denmark 4	1 Kazakhstan
26.03.17	Romania 0	0 Denmark
10.06.17	Kazakhstan 1	3 Denmark
01.09.17	Denmark 4	0 Poland
04.09.17	Armenia 1	4 Denmark
05.10.17	Montenegro 0	1 Denmark
11.10.17	Denmark 1	1 Romania
PLAY-OFFS		
11.11.17	Denmark 0	0 Rep Ireland
14.11.17	Rep Ireland 1	5 Denmark

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TWELVE GAMES
Thomas DELANEY (10+2), Christian ERIKSEN (12), Simon KJAER (12)
ELEVEN
William KVIST (11)
NINE
Nicolai JORGENSEN (8+1), Yussef POULSEN (6+3), Kasper SCHMEICHEL (9)
EIGHT
Andreas CORNELIUS (6+2), Riza DURMISI (7+1), Pione SISTO (6+2)
SEVEN
Peter ANKERSEN (6+1)
SIX
Andreas BJELLEND (6), Andreas CHRISTENSEN (6), Jens STRYGER LARSEN (6)
FIVE
Niklas BENDTNER (1+4), Henrik DALSGAARD (4+1)
FOUR
Viktor FISCHER (3+1), Lasse SCHONE (1+3), Jannik VESTERGAARD (4)
THREE
Kasper DOLBERG (0+3), Pierre-Emile HOJBERG (3), Frederik RONNOW (3)
TWO
Martin BRAITHWAITE (1+1), Mathias JORGENSEN (1+1)
ONE
Mike JENSEN (0+1), Lukas LERANGER (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
11 goals... Christian Eriksen
4... Thomas Delaney
2... Andreas Cornelius, Nicolai Jorgensen
1... Peter Ankersen, Nicklas Bendtner, Andreas Christensen, Kasper Dolberg, Yussuf Poulsen, own goal

The unanswered questions

What system gives the most freedom to Christian Eriksen?
Age Hareide prefers a 4-3-3 formation that allows Eriksen the space to operate behind a main striker and two wide men.

Can Andreas Christensen become a regular at Chelsea?
If so he will surely become one of the central defenders for Denmark in Russia, rather than filling in at right-back.

Revelation... Pione Sisto

Can striker Kasper Dolberg recover his dynamic form of last season?
If he starts to find form with Ajax again, he could overtake Andreas Cornelius and Niklas Bendtner in the pecking order.

Who will score the goals if Eriksen is absent through injury?
The obvious weakness is lack of goals and the over-reliance on Eriksen scoring. Yussuf Poulsen is one player who needs to become more prolific.

Cuper ends drought

Pharaohs are in finals for first time since 1990

For decades, Egypt have failed to turn their dominance of the African game into World Cup qualification – until a last-gasp penalty ensured their place in the field for Russia 2018. They last participated at the finals in 1990 and since then they have suffered the agony of several close misses, including a rare play-off game after finishing level with Algeria in the 2010 preliminaries. Over the years a myriad of coaches – including Ruud Krol, Marco Tardelli and Bob Bradley – have tried to take them to the promised land, but it was Hector Cuper who finally got them over the line.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2015** A 1-0 loss away to Chad in the first leg of a preliminary game held out the possibility that the 2018 campaign might again be another Egyptian flop. However, it takes just 10 minutes in the return for the deficit to be cancelled out and they go on to win 4-1 on aggregate.
- **Nov 2016** Ghana had hammered Egypt 6-1 to qualify for the 2014 finals but revenge is extracted with a 2-0 win for the Pharaohs, who suddenly find themselves five points clear in Group E.
- **Sep 2017** Having lost 1-0 in Kampala just days earlier, Egypt host Uganda in Alexandria and win a nervy encounter with an early goal from Mohamed Salah in a less than convincing performance.
- **Oct 2017** Needing a win to make sure that they qualify with a game still to play, a last-gasp Salah penalty ends the agony for Egyptian supporters as they edge bottom-placed Congo 2-1 at the Borg El Arab Stadium.

THE COACH

Hector Cuper, age 61 (16.11.55)
Appointed in March 2015 on a three-year contract, the Argentinian took Mallorca to the European Cup-winners Cup Final and Valencia to two successive Champions League Finals.

THE PLAYERS

Star Mohamed Salah is very much the talisman of the team.
Stalwarts Keeper Essam El Hadary, who is 45 in January, could become the oldest player ever at the World Cup. Ahmed Fathy has won 122 caps, while mercurial midfield talent Shikabala has recently returned to the national set-up after a three-year absence.
Missing Basem Morsy has not played since being punished for leaving the stadium after being substituted when Egypt beat Ghana in November 2016.
Debut Amr Marey, a striker who plays for Etoile Sahel in Tunisia, received his first call-up.

Mark Gleeson

Revenge...celebrating a goal against Ghana

Talisman... Mohamed Salah

AFRICAN QUALIFICATION

PRELIMINARY ROUND

14.11.15	Chad 1	**0 Egypt**
17.11.15	**Egypt 4**	0 Chad

Group E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	6	4	1	1	8	4	13
Uganda	6	2	3	1	3	2	9
Ghana	6	1	4	1	7	5	7
Congo	6	0	2	4	5	12	2

09.10.16	Congo 1	**2 Egypt**
13.11.16	**Egypt 2**	0 Ghana
31.08.17	Uganda 1	**0 Egypt**
05.09.17	**Egypt 1**	0 Uganda
08.10.17	**Egypt 2**	1 Congo
12.11.17	Ghana 1	**1 Egypt**

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHT GAMES
Mohamed ELNENY (8)
SIX GAMES
Tarek HAMED (6), Ahmed HEGAZI (6), Abdallah SAID (5+1), Ramadan SOBHI (3+3), TREZEGUET (4+2)
FIVE GAMES
Mohamed ABDEL-SHAFY (5), Essam EL HADARY (5), KOUKA (3+2), Mohamed SALAH (5)
FOUR GAMES
Ahmed FATHY (4), Amr GAMAL (1+3), Ramy RABIA (4)
THREE GAMES
Omar GABER (3), Ali GABR (3), Saleh GOMAA (1+2), KAHRABA (3), Basem MORSY (3), Saad SAMIR (1+2), Amr WARDA (0+3), Moamen ZAKARIA (1+2)
TWO GAMES
Ahmed ELMOHAMADY (1+1), Ahmed EL SHENAWY (2), Hossam GHALY (1+1), Sabri RAHIL (2)
ONE GAME
Ahmed DOWIDAR (1), Sherif EKRAMY (1), Mostafa FATHI (1), Islam GAMAL (1), Karim HAFEZ (1), Amr MAREY (1), Sam MORSY (1), SHIKABALA (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
5 goals... Mohamed Salah
3... Abdallah Said
2... Kouka
1... Mohamed Elneny, Shikabala

The unanswered questions

What sights will Egypt be setting themselves next summer?
Hector Cuper says a place in the last 16 is the ambition, but a lack of experience may count against them. Egypt, however, will point to the fact that they reached the Final of the Nations Cup after missing three successive African championships.

Will Essam El Hadary become the oldest player at the World Cup?
After keeping goal in five of the six group games he was left out of Cuper's last squad and has now moved to Saudi Arabia, where he might not get as much competitive action as the coach desires to keep him in shape for Russia.

Action needed... Essam El Hadary

Will Mohamed Salah rise to the challenge on the world stage?
Since he joined Liverpool, Mohamed Salah has upped his reputation and became a major star, not only in Africa but worldwide. These days he is under immense pressure to deliver every time he plays for Egypt and he might find the pressure too much to deliver consistently in the finals.

Who will make a late push for inclusion in the squad?
Basem Morsy might be forgiven for his tantrums as Egypt seek a reliable target man, while Walid Soliman is also due to return after previously criticising the coach for leaving him out of the squad for a friendly game.

Southgate steps up

New boss but same old concerns remain

England qualified comfortably without setting the world alight. They were unbeaten in 10 games but scored only 18 goals and often struggled to break down defensive-minded teams. Gareth Southgate stepped up from an under-21 role following Sam Allardyce's surprise exit. There were disappointing crowds at Wembley – but England still had the highest average attendance of any European qualifier.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** Sam Allardyce quits as manager after 67 days and one game in charge – the 1-0 victory over Slovakia – following a newspaper "sting".
- **Jun 2017** An injury-time equaliser from Harry Kane earns a 2-2 draw with Scotland at Hampden Park.
- **Sep 2017** After struggling to break down a Malta side that put 10 men behind the ball, England score three times in the last five minutes. Three days later, they recover from conceding an early goal to beat Slovakia 2-1.
- **Oct 2017** A 1-0 win over Slovenia at Wembley confirms qualification in front of a disappointing crowd at Wembley.

THE COACH

Gareth Southgate, age 47 (03.09.70)
Caretaker from September 2016, he was handed a four-year deal that November. Previously the under-21s' manager, he played in the 1998 World Cup finals, where England lost in the round of 16, and missed a crucial penalty in England's Euro 96 semi-final penalty shoot-out defeat to Germany.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane rescued the side on a number of occasions with crucial goals and was appointed captain in October 2017.
Stalwarts Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli makes clever runs from midfield. Liverpool midfielder Jordan Henderson was Southgate's preferred choice to anchor the midfield, with Tottenham midfielder Eric Dier. Manchester City's Kyle Walker is a vibrant attacking right-back. Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford was deployed as a wide attacker or from the bench.
Missing All-time leading scorer Wayne Rooney announced his retirement from international football in August 2017. Liverpool pair Adam Lallana and Daniel Sturridge missed much of the qualifying campaign through injury.
Debuts Tottenham midfielder Harry Winks made his debut in the final qualifier against Lithuania. Centre-backs Harry Maguire and Michael Keane, and right-back Kieran Trippier also featured during qualifying.

Gavin Hamilton

Denied...Malta (in red) keep out England

Leader...Harry Kane celebrates his goal against Slovenia

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	10	8	2	0	18	3	26
Slovakia	10	6	0	4	17	7	18
Scotland	10	5	3	2	17	12	18
Slovenia	10	4	3	3	12	7	15
Lithuania	10	1	3	6	7	20	6
Malta	10	0	1	9	3	25	1

04.09.16	Slovakia 0	1 England
08.10.16	England 2	0 Malta
11.10.16	Slovenia 0	0 England
11.11.16	England 3	0 Scotland
26.03.17	England 2	0 Lithuania
10.06.17	Scotland 2	2 England
01.09.17	Malta 0	4 England
04.09.17	England 2	1 Slovakia
05.10.17	England 1	0 Slovenia
08.10.17	Lithuania 0	1 England

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

NINE GAMES
Joe HART (9), Kyle WALKER (9)
EIGHT GAMES
Dele ALLI (7+1), Gary CAHILL (8), Jordan HENDERSON (8), Marcus RASHFORD (4+4)
SEVEN GAMES
Eric DIER (7), Raheem STERLING (5+2), John STONES (7)
SIX GAMES
Ryan BERTRAND (6), Harry KANE (6)
FIVE GAMES
Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN (4+1), Daniel STURRIDGE (3+2)
FOUR GAMES
Adam LALLANA (4), Jesse LINGARD (2+2), Wayne ROONEY (3+1), Danny ROSE (3+1), Jamie VARDY (0+4)
THREE GAMES
Michael KEANE (2+1), Jake LIVERMORE (2+1), Theo WALCOTT (2+1)
TWO GAMES
Jermain DEFOE (1+1), Phil JONES (2), Danny WELBECK (0+2)
ONE GAME
Jack BUTLAND (1), Aaron CRESSWELL (1), Harry MAGUIRE (1), Chris SMALLING (1), Andros TOWNSEND (0+1), Kieran TRIPPIER (1), Harry WINKS (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
5 goals... Harry Kane
2... Adam Lallana, Daniel Sturridge
1... Dele Alli, Ryan Bertrand, Gary Cahill, Jermain Defoe, Eric Dier, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Marcus Rashford, Jamie Vardy, Danny Welbeck

The unanswered questions

Who will score the goals if Harry Kane is injured?
Kane was top scorer in the qualifiers, while Jamie Vardy has struggled to repeat his Leicester form of two years ago, and all-time top scorer Wayne Rooney is no longer available.

Is Joe Hart the right man to be first-choice keeper?
He has struggled for form since leaving Manchester City and was criticised for conceding two free-kicks against Scotland. Jordan Pickford of Everton and Burnley's Tom Heaton are both exciting long-term prospects.

Spark...Jack Wilshere

Which players could make a late push for inclusion?
Tottenham midfielder Harry Winks looks a highly accomplished prospect, while Dominic Calvert-Lewin – a star of England's Under-20 triumph – needs game time at Everton. Midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek was the star of the November friendly against Germany.

Could Jack Wilshere be recalled?
England lacked creativity in midfield in the qualifiers, but although Wilshere could provide that spark he has struggled to make Arsenal's starting line-up following injuries.

Will Southgate opt for a back three?
The manager has encouraged all England teams, from under-17s upwards, to play 4-2-3-1 but has recently experimented with a 3-4-3.

Les Bleus are looking to youth

Deschamps has some exciting young talent

France qualified by topping European Group A, but Sweden pushed them all the way to the final round of matches. Didier Deschamps' team needed a win in their last game against Belarus to be sure of going to Russia and delivered a 2-1 victory at Stade de France.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2016** Memories of a laborious 0-0 draw with Belarus are banished by an impressive 4-1 home win over Bulgaria – despite falling behind to a sixth-minute penalty.
- **Jun 2017** Facing Sweden in Solna, keeper Hugo Lloris commits a howler in added time, messing up a clearance that allows Ola Toivonen to score from the halfway line as France lose 2-1.
- **Aug 2017** Thomas Lemar scores twice in a 4-0 win over Holland. Kylian Mbappe scores his first international goal and Deschamps' team go top of the group as Sweden lose 3-2 in Bulgaria.
- **Oct 2017** First-half goals from Antoine Griezmann and Olivier Giroud wrap up qualification with a 2-1 victory at home to Belarus.

THE COACH

Didier Deschamps, age 49 (15.10.68)
The former France captain won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 as a player before taking over as the country's coach in 2012. Known for his no-nonsense style, his mistrust of the press and an ability to make tough decisions, he signed a contract extension in October that will keep him in charge until 2020.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Antoine Griezmann is one of the most coveted attackers in the game. Teen striker Kylian Mbappe is being hailed as one of the world's most exciting talents.
Stalwarts Goalkeeper and national team skipper Hugo Lloris is fast closing in on a century of appearances. Rafael Varane brings calm and authority to the centre of defence, while Blaise Matuidi remains a Deschamps favourite in midfield.
Missing Karim Benzema is technically available for selection after his alleged involvement in a sex-tape scandal in 2015, but the striker hasn't been picked for more than two years. Left-back Benjamin Mendy has been out injured since September.
Debuts Mbappe and Mendy both made their debuts in a 3-1 win in Luxembourg.

Howard Johnson

Tussle...Olivier Giroud takes on Holland

Exciting... Kylian Mbappe

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Sweden	10	6	1	3	26	9	19
Holland	10	6	1	3	21	12	19
Bulgaria	10	4	1	5	14	19	13
Luxembourg	10	1	3	6	8	26	6
Belarus	10	1	2	7	6	21	5

06.09.16	Belarus 0	0 France
07.10.16	France 4	1 Bulgaria
10.10.16	Holland 0	1 France
11.11.16	France 2	1 Sweden
25.03.17	Luxembourg 1	3 France
09.06.17	Sweden 2	1 France
31.08.17	France 4	0 Holland
03.09.17	France 0	0 Luxembourg
07.10.17	Bulgaria 0	1 France
10.10.17	France 2	1 Belarus

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TEN GAMES
Antoine GRIEZMANN (10), Djibril SIDIBE (9+1)
NINE GAMES
Hugo LLORIS (9+1)
EIGHT GAMES
Olivier GIROUD (7+1), Laurent KOSCIELNY (8), Dimitri PAYET (5+3)
SEVEN GAMES
N'Golo KANTE (5+2), Blaise MATUIDI (7), Paul POGBA (7), Raphael VARANE (7)
SIX GAMES
Kylian MBAPPE (2+4), Moussa SISSOKO (5+1)
FIVE GAMES
Layvin KURZAWA (5), Samule UMTITI (5)
FOUR GAMES
Thomas LEMAR (3+1)
THREE GAMES
Kingsley COMAN (2+1), Nabil FEKIR (0+3), Kevin GAMEIRO (2+1), Alexandre LACAZETTE (1+2)
TWO GAMES
Ousmane DEMBELE (1+1), Lucas DIGNE (2), Andre-Pierre GIGNAC (0+2), Anthony MARTIAL (1+1), Benjamin MENDY (2), Adrien RABIOT (0+2), Corentin TOLISSO (2)
ONE GAME
Patric EVRA (1), Christophe JALLET (0+1), Steve MANDANDA (1), Bacary SAGNA (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
4 goals... Olivier Giroud, Antoine Griezmann
2... Kevin Gameiro, Thomas Lemar, Dimitri Payet, Paul Pogba
1... Blaise Matuidi, Kylian Mbappe

The unanswered questions

Will Didier Deschamps stick to his preferred 4-3-3 system?
Having dabbled with 4-4-2, will he be daring and flexible enough to employ other systems? With the defensive talent at his disposal, three at the back isn't unimaginable.

Can N'Golo Kante establish himself as a world star?
Acknowledged as the Premier League's best midfielder last season, the Chelsea player now needs to make his mark at international level.

Stage set... N'Golo Kante

Will this be the World Cup that establishes Paul Pogba?
The midfielder has all the attributes to become a world star, but he's not there yet. Russia could be the stage on which that all changes.

Will there be any surprise selections?
France have so much talent it's frightening. Defender Aymeric Laporte, midfielders Tiemoue Bakayoko and Wylan Cyprien, and striker Moussa Dembele are among those pushing for a place.

Is today's France better than the team that made it to the Final of Euro 2016?
Quite possibly, as they have more athletic full-backs to call on and some audacious youngsters emerging up front. Deschamps has tons of talent at his disposal but needs to make the team gel sufficiently to go all the way.

Nobody's done it better

Low's men qualify with a 100 per cent record

Compiling the best-ever World Cup qualifying campaign by a European team, Germany were absolutely ruthless, winning all 10 of their games and ending up with a gargantuan goal-difference of +39. Coach Joachim Low would have been especially pleased with the way his team shared the goals out, with no fewer than 21 players on the scoresheet.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** Keeper Manuel Neuer makes his bow as captain, while Thomas Muller ends a 10-month international goal drought in a 3-0 win over Norway.
- **Oct 2016** A 2-0 win in Hanover against Northern Ireland makes it three wins out of three, courtesy of goals from Julian Draxler and Sami Khedira.
- **Sep 2017** Mats Hummels' header secures a 2-1 victory in the Czech Republic but, furious at the behaviour of Nazi sympathisers in the stands in Prague, the German players refuse to celebrate with their fans at the final whistle.
- **Oct 2017** Qualification is sealed as Northern Ireland are beaten 3-1 in Belfast.

THE COACH

Joachim Low, age 57 (03.02.60)
Appointed July 2006 and under contract until 2020, he is currently Europe's longest-serving national coach. "Jogi" has done a remarkable job as *Bundestrainer*, steering his side to the world title in 2014 and countless near-misses in other tournaments. He has also revolutionised the German style of play, abandoning the strong arm and the safety first for dynamism and creativity.

THE PLAYERS

Stars With his 20/20 vision, exceptional distribution and icy composure, midfield ace Toni Kroos is the man who sets the strategic tone. Whether it be on or off the pitch, centre-back Mats Hummels stands for immaculate leadership.
Stalwarts Following a spell in the international doldrums, Thomas Muller bounced back with a vengeance in the qualifiers, scoring five goals and making seven others. Joshua Kimmich was Germany's only ever-present on the road to Russia, notably catching the eye with his nine assists.
Missing Manuel Neuer sat out the bulk of the campaign with a broken foot. Beset by groin and cruciate ligament injuries, attacker Marco Reus did not play in a single qualifier.
Debuts Already spoilt for choice in the midfield department, Germany have discovered yet another ace schemer in Leon Goretzka. Striker Timo Werner made an immediate impact on the side, netting three goals in just two starts in qualifying.

Nick Bidwell

Power...Matthias Ginter (left) and Mats Hummels take on the Czech Republic

Impact... Timo Werner

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	10	10	0	0	43	4	30
N Ireland	10	6	1	3	17	6	19
Czech Rep	10	4	3	3	17	10	15
Norway	10	4	1	5	17	16	13
Azerbaijan	10	3	1	6	10	19	10
San Marino	10	0	0	10	2	51	0

04.09.16	Norway 0	3 Germany
08.10.16	Germany 3	0 Czech Rep
11.10.16	Germany 2	0 N Ireland
11.11.16	San Marino 0	8 Germany
26.03.17	Azerbaijan 1	4 Germany
10.06.17	Germany 7	0 San Marino
01.09.17	Czech Rep 1	2 Germany
04.09.17	Germany 6	0 Norway
05.10.17	N Ireland 1	3 Germany
08.10.17	Germany 5	1 Azerbaijan

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS

TEN GAMES Joshua KIMMICH (10)
NINE Thomas MULLER (9)
EIGHT Julian DRAXLER (7+1), Jonas HECTOR (8), Mats HUMMELS (8),
SEVEN Toni KROOS (7)
SIX Sami KHEDIRA (5+1), Mesut OZIL (5+1)
FIVE Julian BRANDT (3+2), Leon GORETZKA (3+2), Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (5)
FOUR Emre CAN (2+2), Mario GOTZE (4), Lars STINDL (3+1),
THREE Jerome BOATENG (3), Mario GOMEZ (2+1), Ilkay GUNDOGAN (1+2), Benedikt HOWEDES (2+1), Shkodran MUSTAFI (2+1), Manuel NEUER (3), Antonio RUDIGER (1+2), Sebastian RUDY (2+1), Leroy SANE (1+2), Sandro WAGNER (3), Timo WERNER (2+1)
TWO Matthias GINTER (1+1), Bernd LENO (2), Max MEYER (0+2), Marvin PLATTENHARDT (1+1), Kevin VOLLAND (0+2), Amin YOUNES (1+1)
ONE Diego DEMME (0+1), Serge GNABRY (1), Benjamin HENRICHS (1), Andre SCHURRLE (1), Niklas SULE (1), Julian WEIGL (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
5... Thomas Muller, Sandro Wagner
3... Julian Draxler, Serge Gnabry, Leon Goretzka, Timo Werner
2... Mario Gomez, Jonas Hector, Sami Khedira, Joshua Kimmich, Andre Schurrle
1... Julian Brandt, Emre Can, Mats Hummels, Toni Kroos, Shkodran Mustafi, Mesut Ozil, Antonio Rudiger, Sebastian Rudy, Kevin Volland, Amin Younes, own goal

The Unanswered Questions

How predictable will be the make-up of the squad?
Anything but. Joachim Low has never had a deeper pool of talent at his disposal and hard choices will have to be made. He used 37 players in qualifying – and in the wake of recent German triumphs at the Confederations Cup and European Under-21s he has even more candidates to sift through.

Benched...Julian Draxler

Who could pay the price for a lack of game time at club level?
Low has to be concerned that a number of his squad are either bench fodder or struggling with injuries, not least keeper Kevin Trapp and midfielder Julian Draxler at PSG, Dortmund wide-man Andre Schurrle and Juventus' Benedikt Howedes. Dortmund winger Marco Reus is out until March with a cruciate knee ligament injury .

Does Low have a full-back problem?
There is no real alternative to Joshua Kimmich at right-back and there is cause for concern on the other flank too. The usual incumbent, Jonas Hector – who has been sidelined of late with an ankle problem – has his limitations. RB Leipzig's Marcel Halstenberg made his debut against England at Wembley.

False nine or target man?
Low has options. Either Sandro Wagner or Mario Gomez as a traditional centre-forward, or Timo Werner, Lars Stindl or Mario Gotze as the crafty freewheeler. Nor is a strike-duo out of the question.

Another adventure

The smallest nation ever to reach the finals

Amazingly, Iceland reached their first World Cup finals as winners of their group. They are by far the smallest nation ever to qualify and – at a mere 339,000 – the first with a population under a million. The team were a bit rusty at first, following an amazing run at their first major tournament at Euro 2016, where they were unbeaten until losing in the quarter-finals to hosts France. The players grew in strength and, against all odds, won seven of their 10 games, including all of their home games.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** A lucky 3-2 win over Finland with two goals in injury time, including a disputed winner.
- **Sep 2017** Strangely, a 1-0 loss to Finland in Tampere, with three more games to play, is crucial. The players realise they have probably become complacent and, following the defeat, they go back to basics.
- **Oct 2017** A fantastic 3-0 win away to Turkey puts Iceland on top of the group again, as Croatia draw at home against Finland the same night.
- **Oct 2017** Playing hosts to Kosovo, and with their fate in their own hands, they break down their resilient guests just before half-time, adding a second goal after the interval.

THE COACH

Heimir Hallgrimsson, age 50 (10.06.67)
A qualified dentist who still runs a clinic in his native Westmann Islands, he was appointed assistant to Lars Lagerback, when the Icelandic Football Federation hired the Swede as national coach in 2011. Shortly after failing to qualify for the 2014 World Cup, Hallgrimsson and Lagerback signed contracts as joint managers, and when the Swede called it a day after Euro 2016, Hallgrimsson became the sole boss.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Although having a very quiet start to his Everton career, midfielder Gylfi Sigurdsson was top scorer during the World Cup qualifying campaign.
Stalwarts Captain Aron Einar Gunnarsson is the heart of the Iceland team, with Sigurdsson being the brain. Gunnarsson's never-say-die attitude is crucial, pulling the strings in midfield and allowing Sigurdsson time and space to attack. Centre-backs Ragnar Sigurdsson and Kari Arnason are an important pairing, with keeper Hannes Halldorsson another essential piece in the puzzle.
Missing Forward Kolbeinn Sigthorsson has hardly played since Euro 2016, having sustained a knee injury in September 2016, but he hopes to return to action before the end of 2017.

Skapti Hallgrimsson

Eye on the prize... taking on Ukraine

Skipper...Aron Einar Gunnarsson

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iceland	10	7	1	2	16	7	22
Croatia	10	6	2	2	15	4	20
Ukraine	10	5	2	3	13	9	17
Turkey	10	4	3	3	14	13	15
Finland	10	2	3	5	9	13	9
Kosovo	10	0	1	9	3	24	1

05.09.16	Ukraine 1	1 Iceland
06.10.16	Iceland 3	2 Finland
09.10.16	Iceland 2	0 Turkey
12.11.16	Croatia 2	0 Iceland
24.03.17	Kosovo 1	2 Iceland
11.06.17	Iceland 1	0 Croatia
02.09.17	Finland 1	0 Iceland
05.09.17	Iceland 2	0 Ukraine
06.10.17	Turkey 0	3 Iceland
09.10.17	Iceland 2	0 Kosovo

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TEN GAMES
Birkir SAEVARSSON (10), Gylfi SIGURDSSON (10), Ragnar SIGURDSSON (10)
NINE
Kari ARNASON (9), Birkir BJARNASON (9), Johan GUDMUNDSSON (9), Aron GUNNARSSON (9), Hannes HALLDORSSON (9)
EIGHT
Jon BODVARSSON (6+2), Alfred FINNBOGASON (6+2), Hordur MAGNUSSON (6+2)
SIX
Emil HALLFREDSSON (5+1), Bjorn SIGURDARSON (2+4)
FIVE
Ari SKULASON (4+1)
FOUR
Sverrir INGASON (1+3), Vidar KJARTANSSON (1+3)
THREE
Elmar BJARNASON (2+1), Rurik GISLASON (0+3), Olafur SKULASON (0+3), Arnor TRAUSTASON (1+2)
ONE
Ogmundur KRISTINSSON (1), Runar SIGURJONSSON (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
4 goals... Gylfi Sigurdsson
3... Alfred Finnbogason
2... Kari Arnason, Johann Berg Gudmundsson
1... Birkar Bjarnason, Hordur Bjorgvin Magnusson, Bjorn Bergmann Sigurdarson, Ragnar Sigurdsson, own goal

The unanswered questions

How can such a small nation qualify for the World Cup?
The recent generation of players is strong, both physically and mentally. All of them playing professionally abroad, although few are with big teams in strong leagues.

How have Iceland climbed the FIFA ranking list so quickly?
The transition can be traced back 15 years to when the country started building indoor football arenas. Before then, adverse weather conditions meant players could not train properly during the winter. Another reason is a high standard of coaches.

Trial...a friendly against Qatar

Has Iceland got enough strength in depth if key players get injured?
If important players such as captain Gunnarsson or Gylfi Sigurdsson are not available, their replacements would not be of the same quality even though Iceland has a pretty strong squad of 20 to 25 players. Recent friendlies suggest that, at this moment in time, others are not ready to step up.

Will Heimir Hallgrimsson stick to his tried and tested 4-4-2 formation?
Iceland usually play 4-4-2 but during the qualifiers they sometimes used a 4-5-1 set-up, with Sigurdsson in the hole behind a lone striker. In a recent friendly they even experimented with three centre-backs in a five-man defensive line – which could be used at times in the summer.

Back-to-back successes

Queiroz takes team to second successive finals

By far the best qualifiers in Asia, Iran never looked in danger of not making a second successive World Cup – the first time in their history they have achieved such a feat. Unbeaten in 10 games in the final group stage and conceding only twice, Carlos Queiroz has developed a well-organised, well-oiled and well-drilled machine. Now it is all about taking the team to the next level.

KEY DATES IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** The opening game of the final round, in front of almost 80,000 fans in Tehran, and Iran are frustrated by Qatar until Reza Ghoochannejhad breaks the deadlock in the fourth minute of injury time.
- **Oct 2016** A 1-0 win over South Korea in Tehran puts Iran in control of the group as a masterclass from Queiroz helps produce a performance that is far more dominant than the scoreline suggests.
- **Mar 2017** Back-to-back 1-0 wins over Qatar and China in the space of five days means that the football-mad nation is on the brink of Russia.
- **Jun 2017** The inevitable is confirmed with a 2-0 victory over Uzbekistan and there is dancing on the streets of Tehran.

THE COACH

Carlos Queiroz, age 64 (01.03.53)
In place for six years, he has used his considerable experience to get the team where it is today. He has qualified three different national teams for four World Cups: South Africa, Portugal and now Iran – where he is beloved by fans. Next summer could be his biggest test and potential success.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Sardar Azmoun can lay claim to be the best striker in Asia at the moment, while Reza Ghoochannejhad has been scoring goals for fun with Heerenveen in the Dutch top flight.
Stalwarts Mehdi Taremi has his critics at home but the striker often pops up with a goal when needed. Veteran defender Jalal Hosseini has over a century of appearances and is still going strong.
Missing Captain Javad Nekounam bowed out just before the qualification campaign started, while former Premier League midfielder Andranik Teymourian has not appeared this year.
Debuts Aged 21, Saeid Ezatolahi is being hailed as the "Persian Pogba" and the Russian-based midfielder has all the attributes to become a real star.

John Duerden

Joy...after the home win against Uzbekistan

Future...Ezatolahi

ASIAN QUALIFICATION

2nd Rd, Group D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	8	6	2	0	26	3	20
Oman	8	4	2	2	11	7	14
Turkmenistan	8	4	1	3	10	11	13
Guam	8	2	1	5	3	16	7
India	8	1	0	7	5	18	3

16.06.15	Turkmenistan 1	1 Iran
03.09.15	Iran 6	0 Guam
08.09.15	India 0	3 Iran
08.10.15	Oman 1	1 Iran
12.11.15	Iran 3	1 Turkmenistan
17.11.15	Guam 0	6 Iran
24.03.16	Iran 4	0 India
29.03.16	Iran 2	0 Oman

3rd Rd, Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	10	6	4	0	10	2	22
South Korea	10	4	3	3	11	10	15
Syria	10	3	4	3	9	8	13
Uzbekistan	10	4	1	5	6	7	13
China	10	3	3	4	8	10	12
Qatar	10	2	1	7	8	15	7

01.09.16	Iran 2	0 Qatar
06.09.16	China 0	0 Iran
06.10.16	Uzbekistan 0	1 Iran
11.11.16	Iran 1	0 South Korea
15.11.16	Syria 0	0 Iran
23.03.17	Qatar 0	1 Iran
28.03.17	Iran 1	0 China
12.06.17	Iran 2	0 Uzbekistan
31.08.17	South Korea 0	0 Iran
05.09.17	Iran 2	2 Syria

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

SEVENTEEN GAMES
Vahid AMIRI (11+6)
SIXTEEN Sardar AZMOUN (12+1), Mehdi TAREMI (12+4)
FOURTEEN Alireza JAHANBAKHSH (11+3), Ramin REZAEIAN (12+2)
THIRTEEN Saeid EZATOLAHI (12+1), Ehsan HAJSAFI (13)
TWELVE Alireza BEIRANVAND (12), Ashkan DEJAGAH (11+1), Morteza POURALIGANJI (12)
ELEVEN Jalal HOSSEINI (9+2)
TEN Omid EBRAHIMI (8+2), Milad MOHAMMADI (10), Pejman MONTAZERI (10)
NINE Reza GHOOCHANNEJHAD (3+6), Andranik TEYMOURIAN (7+2)
SEVEN Masoud SHOJAEI (5+2), Medhi TORABI (3+4)
SIX Karim ANSARIFARD (3+3)
FIVE Vouria GHAFOURI (5)
FOUR Alireza HAGHIGHI (4), Ezzatollah POURGHAZ (2+2)
THREE Khosro HEYDARI (2+1), Ali KARIMI (2+1), Kaveh REZAEI (1+2)
TWO Omid ALISHAH (0+2), Mohammad ANSARI (2), Rouzbeh CHESHMI (0+2), Kamal KAMYABINIA (1+1)
ONE Hossein KANAANIZADEGAN (1), Sosha MAKANI (1), Mohammad MAZAHERI (1), Dariush SHOJAEIAN (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
11 goals... Sardar Azmoun
8... Mehdi Taremi
2... Ashkan Dejagah, Ehsan Hajsafi, Jalal Hosseini, Alireza Jahanbakhsh,
1... Karim Ansarifard, Saeid Ezatolahi, Reza Ghoochannejhad, Kamal Kamyabinia, Morteza Pouraliganji, Ramin Rezaeian, Masoud Shojaei, Andranik Teymourian, Mehdi Torabi

The unanswered questions

Will Iran be able to score goals?
Despite having such a talented attacker such as Sardar Azmoun, goals did not exactly flow freely in qualification. To get out of the group, he is going to need support.

Who will step up when the pressure is on?
Iran has long had powerful midfielders, both physically and mentally, but the present crop is younger and more technical. With the team's stroll to the World Cup it remains to be seen who will emerge as a leader when the pressure is really on.

Support...Sardar Azmoun

Will preparation help or hinder?
While Japan and South Korea regularly play some of the world's biggest sides, Iran struggle to attract the same calibre of friendly opposition. Carlos Queiroz has openly called upon the national federation to pull out all the stops to get the team ready.

Out with the old

Halilhodzic giving youth its chance

Japan qualified automatically for their sixth consecutive World Cup with commanding performances in the games that mattered, but there were also hiccups along the way – such as a home loss to the UAE. Coach Vahid Halilhodzic has never stopped tinkering and bringing in young talent, so the team is far from settled yet.

KEY EVENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Jun 2015** Japan draw 0-0 at home to Singapore but win every other game in the group after that, keeping clean sheets in each.
- **Sep 2016** An uphill struggle is in prospect after they lose 2-1 at home to the UAE in their round-three opener.
- **Nov 2016** A controversial penalty gives Japan the edge shortly before half-time as they beat Saudi Arabia 2-1.
- **Aug 2017** Yosuke Ideguchi sets up the first and scores in the second to secure automatic qualification in a 2-0 win over Australia – Japan's first-ever World Cup qualifying victory over their opponents in eight attempts.

THE COACH

Vahid Halilhodzic, age 65 (15.10.52)
Led Algeria in Brazil 2012 and took over Japan in March 2015 after Javier Aguirre was sacked in relation to match-fixing investigations in Spain. He has produced the results and had great success in blooding young players in big games, but it has not always been a smooth journey.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Shinji Kagawa, Keisuke Honda, Shinji Okazaki and Yuto Nagatomo should all be in Russia, but their playing time has been sharply reduced.
Stalwarts Maya Yoshida is a rock at the heart of defence. Hotaru Yamaguchi is now the key holding player in midfield, while Eiji Kawashima is back as the first choice in goal.
Missing Influential captain Makoto Hasebe was missing for much of 2017 through injury.
Debuts Youngsters now making their mark include Yuya Kubo, Takuma Asano, Yosuke Ideguchi and Wataru Endo.

Mike Plastow

Russia-bound ...Shinji Okazaki

ASIAN QUALIFICATION

2nd Rd: Group E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	8	7	1	0	27	0	22
Syria	8	6	0	2	26	11	18
Singapore	8	3	1	4	9	9	10
Afghanistan	8	3	0	5	8	24	9
Cambodia	8	0	0	8	1	27	0

16.06.15	Japan 0	0 Singapore
03.09.15	Japan 3	0 Cambodia
08.09.15	Afghanistan 0	6 Japan
08.10.15	Syria 0	3 Japan
12.11.15	Singapore 0	3 Japan
17.11.15	Cambodia 0	2 Japan
24.03.16	Japan 5	0 Afghanistan
29.03.16	Japan 5	0 Syria

3rd Rd: Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	10	6	2	2	17	7	20
Saudi Arabia	10	6	1	3	17	10	19
Australia	10	5	4	1	16	11	19
UAE	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Iraq	10	3	2	5	11	12	11
Thailand	10	0	2	8	6	24	2

01.09.16	Japan 1	2 UAE
06.09.16	Thailand 0	2 Japan
06.10.16	Japan 2	1 Iraq
11.10.16	Australia 1	1 Japan
15.11.16	Japan 2	1 Saudi Arabia
23.03.17	UAE 0	2 Japan
28.03.17	Japan 4	0 Thailand
13.06.17	Iraq 1	1 Japan
31.08.17	Japan 2	0 Australia
05.09.11	Saudi Arabia 1	0 Japan

Rock...Maya Yoshida

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHTEEN GAMES Genki HARAGUCHI (12+6), Maya YOSHIDA (18)
SIXTEEN Keisuke HONDA (12+4)
FIFTEEN Shinji OKAZAKI (12+3), Hiroki SAKAI (15), Hotaru YAMAGUCHI (13+2)
THIRTEEN Makoto HASEBE (13), Shinji KAGAWA (10+3), Yuto NAGATOMO (13)
TWELVE Masato MORISHIGE (12)
ELEVEN Shusaku NISHIKAWA (11)
TEN Takashi USAMI (3+7)
NINE Hiroshi KIYOTAKE (6+3)
SEVEN Gotoku SAKAI (6+1)
SIX Tekuma ASANO (2+4), Eiji KAWASHIMA (6), Yuya KUBO (4+2), Yoshinori MUTO (2+4)
FIVE Kobayashi KASHIWAGI (4+1), Yuya OSAKO (4+1)
FOUR Yuki KOBAYASHI (0+4)
THREE Wataru ENDO (2+1), Yosuke IDEGUCHI (3), Mu KANAZAKI (2+1), Tomoaki MAKINO (3), Gen SHOJI (3)
TWO Yasuyuki KONNO (1+1), Shu KURATA (1+1), Gaiku SHIBASAKI (1+1)
ONE Mike HAVENAAR (0+1), Masaaki HIGASHIGUCHI (1), Takashi INUI (1), Shinzu KOROKI (0+1), Yoichi MARUYAMA (0+1), Takumi MINAMINO (0+1), Ryota OSHIMA (1), Kosuke OTA (1), Kenyu SUGIMOTO (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
7goals... Keisuke Honda
6... Shinji Kagawa
5... Genki Haraguchi, Maya Yoshida, Shinji Okazaki
3... own goals
2... Tekuma Asano, Yuya Kubo, Mu Kanazaki
1... Yosuke Ideguchi, Hiroshi Kiyotake, Yasuyuki Konno, Masato Morishige, Yuya Osako, Takashi Usami, Hotaru Yamaguchi

The unanswered questions

Who are the strikers?
The midfield formation varies but Halilhodzic likes to stick with a three-man front line. Yuya Osako is the first-choice centre-forward but all three positions are still up for grabs.

Who will provide the ammunition for the front three?
Makoto Hasebe, if fit, but watch out for new faces here, notably Ideguchi and Shu Kurata – both players also possess superb long-range shots.

New face... Shu Kurata

Who will keep goal?
Eiji Kawashima was back as first choice in the final qualifiers but Halilhodzic plays mind games and Shusaku Nishikawa is now back in the squad.

Can Japan defend?
It's the same old question that just won't go away. The organisation is there but there may be just too many covering errors for success at the very top level.

El Tri on a high

Osorio hopes to reach last eight at least

As seems to be the case every four years, Mexico will arrive in Russia with the mission to advance to the quarter-finals while wrapped in doubts and in the middle of a heated public debate about the quality of the team and its coach. However, unlike on most other occasions, this time *El Tri* topped the CONCACAF qualifying table with ease . Given the quality at their disposal, if the draw is kind to them, this time around the team might just end its streak of six consecutive round-of-16 exits.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** Mexico beat USA 2-1 with a last-minute goal by Rafa Marquez. It is *El Tri*'s first victory in the American stronghold of Columbus, Ohio, where they had previously lost four times in a row.
- **Mar 2017** With a 2-0 win against Costa Rica, Mexico take first place in the qualifying group – a spot that they will never relinquish during the rest of the campaign.
- **Sep 2017** Mexico qualify for the finals with three games to play by defeating Panama 1-0 at Estadio Azteca thanks to a goal from Hirving Lozano.
- **Oct 2017** *El Tri* make sure of a first-place finish for the first time since 1998 with a 3-1 victory over Trinidad & Tobago.

THE COACH

Juan Carlos Osorio, age 56 (08.06.61)

Appointed in October 2015, he was assistant to Stuart Pearce at Manchester City before starting a coaching career in his native Colombia, moving on to Mexico, Brazil and the United States. He won a league title with Once Caldas and three more with Atletico Nacional in Colombia.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Although he did not have the best start to the season at West Ham, Javier Hernandez is his country's all-time top goalscorer and remains the team's most recognisable face.

Stalwarts With 143 international caps yet still only 31 years of age, captain Andres Guardado provides calm leadership in midfield. The same can also be said of Hector Moreno at the back. Hector Herrera, Jesus Corona and Miguel Layun have been regulars in recent years, as has keeper Guillermo Ochoa.

Missing Alfredo Talavera has alternated between the posts with Ochoa in recent years but a knee injury means he is likely to miss the finals.

Debut It will be a first World Cup for the new star of the team, winger Hirving Lozano, who has taken the Dutch league by storm since joining PSV.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

On top...Hector Herrera (left) and Rafael Marquez get the better of USA's Bobby Wood

Calm...Guardado

CONCACAF QUALIFICATION

4th Rd Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	6	5	1	0	13	1	16
Honduras	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Canada	6	2	1	3	5	8	7
El Salvador	6	0	2	4	4	13	2

13.11.15	Mexico 3	0 El Salvador
17.11.15	Honduras 0	2 Mexico
25.03.16	Canada 0	3 Mexico
29.03.16	Mexico 2	0 Canada
02.09.16	El Salvador 1	3 Mexico
06.09.16	Mexico 0	0 Honduras

Fifth Round	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	10	6	3	1	16	7	21
Costa Rica	10	4	4	2	14	8	16
Panama	10	3	4	3	9	10	13
Honduras	10	3	4	3	13	19	13
USA	10	3	3	4	17	13	12
Trinidad & Tobago	10	2	0	8	7	19	6

11.11.16	USA 1	2 Mexico
15.11.16	Panama 0	0 Mexico
24.03.17	Mexico 2	0 Costa Rica
28.03.17	Trinidad & T 0	1 Mexico
08.06.17	Mexico 3	0 Honduras
11.06.17	Mexico 1	1 USA
01.09.17	Mexico 1	0 Panama
05.09.17	Costa Rica 1	1 Mexico
06.10.17	Mexico 3	1 Trinidad & T
10.10.17	Honduras 3	2 Mexico

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

FIFTEEN Hector HERRERA (14+1)
THIRTEEN Hector MORENO (13)
TWELVE Miguel LAYUN (12)
ELEVEN Jesus CORONA (7+3), Andres GUARDADO (10+1), Javier HERNANDEZ (10+1), Diego REYES (11)
TEN Raul JIMENEZ (8+2), Carlos VELA (7+3)
EIGHT Hirving LOZANO (3+5), Guillermo OCHOA (8)
SEVEN Hugo AYALA (6+1)
SIX Javier AQUINO (4+2), Nestor ARAUJO (6), Giovanni DOS SANTOS (6), Carlos SALCEDO (5+1)
FIVE Jonathan DOS SANTOS (5), Rafael MARQUEZ (5), Oribe PERALTA (3+2), Alfredo TALAVERA (5)
FOUR Oswaldo ALANIS (4), Jesus DUENAS (1+3), Marco FABIAN (3+1), Jesus GALLARDO (3+1), Jesus MOLINA (2+2)
THREE Jurgen DAMM (1+2), Orbelin PINEDA (0+3)
TWO Paul AGUILAR (2), Edson ALVAREZ (1+1), Jose CORONA (2), Cesar MONTES (0+2), Luis REYES (2), Angel SEPULVEDA (2), Jose VASQUEZ (0+2)
ONE Yasser CORONA (0+1), Luis FUENTES (1), Elias HERNANDEZ (0+1), Raul LOPEZ (0+1),Moises MUNOZ (1), Jair PEREIRA (1), Rodolfo PIZARRO (0+1), Candido RAMIREZ (0+1), Jorge TORRES (1), Angel ZALDIVAR (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

4 goals... Hirving Lozano
3... Jesus Corona, Javier Hernandez, Carlos Vela
2... Andres Guardado, Hector Herrera, Raul Jimenez
1... Oswaldo Alanis, Nestor Araujo, Jurgen Damm, Miguel Layun, Rafael Marquez, Hector Moreno, Oribe Peralta, Diego Reyes, Angel Sepulveda, own goal

The unanswered questions

Where does the team's biggest weakness lie?

When analysing the Mexican squad you can find an abundance of riches in attack, but they are vulnerable at the back. *El Tri* like to keep possession and dictate the rhythm of games but they suffer when put under pressure and attacked. Coach Juan Carlos Osorio must find a way to balance the team.

Big ask... Hirving Lozano

How far can Hirving Lozano go?

He scored twice in the recent friendly against Belgium and fans will expect him to be the player who makes a difference in Russia. However, at 22, that's a big ask.

Will Rafa Marquez play a fifth World Cup at the age of 39?

He seemed on track for another finals until a US government report accused him of being a "front man" for organised crime. Marquez is now back playing for Atlas but has not been called up by Osorio since the incident.

Renard sparks return

French coach leads African giant's revival

Morocco have long been underachievers on the African footballing stage, given the depth of their squad and the talent they have at their disposal, but in recent years they have ramped up their ambition and they now return to the World Cup stage. They last played in the finals in France in 1998, but are back after hiring Herve Renard to guide their fortunes. A creative midfield is complimented by a strong defence but, although they won one of their qualifying games 6-0, striking is still a problem.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** Held to a goalless draw at home in Marrakech by group favourites Ivory Coast, Morocco have just two points from their opening two Group C games and are already trailing in the standings.
- **Jun 2017** Renard travels to meet Hakim Ziyech in Amsterdam and persuades the Ajax player to rejoin the fold after the midfielder said he would no longer play for Morocco following the coach's decision to leave him out of the squad for the African Nations Cup.
- **Sep 2017** Six goals, including two from Ziyech on his return, against Mali give Morocco an injection of self-belief.
- **Sep 2017** A 0-0 draw with Mali takes them to five points. But Ivory Coast, who could have gone five points clear, lose at home to a weak Gabon side, who are without Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.
- **Nov 2017** Needing only a draw away to Ivory Coast, two goals in as many minutes midway through the first half seal victory.

THE COACH

Herve Renard, age 49 (30.09.68)
After a limited playing career, he got his break as Claude le Roy's assistant with Ghana in 2008 and went on to win African Nations Cup titles with Zambia (2012) and Ivory Coast (2015).

THE PLAYERS

Stars Juventus defender Mehdi Benatia enjoys the highest profile of the Moroccan exports, while the midfield duo of Mbark Boussoufa and Younes Belhanda have a star quality that energises the team.
Stalwarts Dutch-born Karim El Ahmadi is the anchor of the side. Sofiane Boufal has established himself as the top attacker and Hakim Ziyech on the right is a creative force.
Missing Injury saw defender Manuel Da Costa miss much of the qualifying and he could lose his place in the squad. Striker Youssef El Arabi also looks to have been cast aside.
Debuts Feyenoord's Sofyan Amrabat has chosen to play for Morocco over Holland, just as Ziyech did two years earlier.

Mark Gleeson

Winner...Nabil Dirar beats Ivory Coast's Wilfried Zaha

Energy...Mbark Boussoufa

AFRICAN QUALIFICATION

ROUND 2

12.11.15	Morocco 2	0 Equatorial Guinea
15.11.15	Equatorial Guinea 1	1 Morocco

Group C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	6	3	3	0	11	0	12
Ivory Coast	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Gabon	6	1	3	2	2	7	6
Mali	6	0	4	2	1	9	4

08.10.16	Gabon 0	0 Morocco
12.11.16	Morocco 0	0 Ivory Coast
01.09.17	Morocco 6	0 Mali
05.09.17	Mali 0	0 Morocco
07.10.17	Morocco 3	0 Gabon
11.11.17	Ivory Coast 0	2 Morocco

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHT GAMES
MUNIR Mohamedi (8)
SEVEN
Medhi BENATIA (7)
SIX
Nordin AMRABAT (6), Mbark BOUSSOUFA (6), Romain SAISS (6), Hakim ZIYECH (5+1)
FIVE Younes BELHANDA (5), Karim EL AHMADI (5)
FOUR
ACHRAF Hakimi (4), Khalid BOUTAIB (4), Nabil DIRAR (4), Faycal FAJR (2+2), Oussama TANNANE (2+2)
THREE Youssef EL ARABI (3)
TWO Abdelrrahim ACHCHAKIR (1+1), Youssef AIT BENNASSER (1+1), Rachid ALIOUI (0+2), Yacine BAMMOU (1+1), Mehdi CARCELA GONZALEZ (0+2), Fouad CHAFIK (2), Manuel DA COSTA (2), Issam EL ADOUA (2), Omar EL KADDOURI (1+1), Youssef EN NESYRI (1+1), Zouhair FEDDAL (2), Achraf LAZAAR (2), Hamza MENDYL (1+1)
ONE Sofyan AMRABAT (0+1), Badir BANOUN (0+1), Achraf BENCHARKI (0+1), Abdelaziz BERRADA (1), Sofiane BOUFAL (1), Aziz BOUHADDOUZ (0+1), Ismail HADDAD (0+1), Mimoun MAHI (0+1), Amine HARIT (0+1), Adil KARROUCHY (1), Marwene SAADANE (1), Adnane TIGHADOUINI (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
4 goals... Khalid Boutaib
3... Hakim Ziyech
1...Achraf Hakimi, Yacine Bammou, Medhi Benatia, Nabil Dirar, Youssef El Arabi, Faycal Fajr, Mimoun Mahi

The unanswered questions

Will Morocco manage to retain their new-found unity?
There are many disparate elements to a squad that has a French-born contingent, a Dutch-born colony and a few born in Morocco itself. It has not always been harmonious but a return to the World Cup has been built on team spirit.

Is Karim El Ahmadi past his sell by date at international level?
The former Aston Villa midfielder, who is now 32, played a major role in the World Cup qualifying campaign and was also integral to Feyenoord winning the Dutch title last season. However, his legs look to be growing a little weary and he could struggle next summer.

Weary...Karim El Ahmadi

Could Herve Renard's side be a little light in attack?
At the African Nations Cup in January, the gangly Aziz Bouhaddouz – who plays for St Pauli in the German second division – was the team's target man. He has since lost his starting place – and ever since then Morocco have little physical presence in attack.

Will Renard make more changes to keep the regulars on their toes?
Probably! He is a man who likes to have an edgy camp, keeping players on their toes, and he will most likely spring a surprise with some new selections when the team play their next friendlies in March.

Cruise control

Super Eagles ease through group

Nigeria romped through the toughest of Africa's World Cup qualifying groups with such ease that it is difficult to offer a convincing argument against their credentials. However, this current crop of Super Eagles remain a side in need of improvement. It is a young squad, much changed from the team that reached the second round at the last World Cup in Brazil. Kelechi Iheanacho and Alex Iwobi are yet to deliver on the impact that has been expected of them, although Iwobi did get the goal that ensured World Cup qualification when they beat Zambia 1-0.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2016** After the embarrassment of missing out on qualifying for the 2017 African Nations Cup finals, Nigeria go to Zambia for their opening game of their World Cup group and come away with an unexpected 2-1 win, courtesy of first half goals from Iwobi and Iheanacho.
- **Jun 2017** After losing at home to South Africa at the start of the 2019 Nations Cup qualifiers, coach Gernot Rohr only just manages to hold onto his job.
- **Sep 2017** The key group game against the African champions Cameroon has weeks of pre-match hype but what is expected to be a tightly fought affair turns into a 4-0 rout for Nigeria.
- **Oct 2017** Needing only to draw at home to Zambia, Iwobi scores the only goal of the game.

THE COACH

Gernot Rohr, age 64 (28.6.53)
Appointed in August 2016 on a two-year contract, the former Bayern Munich player spent 12 years at Bordeaux, going on to coach the club and take them to the 1996 UEFA Cup Final, where they lost to Bayern. Began his African coaching career at Etoile Sahel and led the national teams of Gabon, Niger and Burkina Faso before his surprise appointment by Nigeria.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Victor Moses proved in the campaign that Nigeria are one level up on their ability when he plays. John Obi Mikel is still the orchestrator in midfield, playing a more advanced midfield role than he did at club level.
Stalwarts Leon Balogun has not been around long but he already captains the side and is the defensive bulwark in a relatively inexperienced back four.
Missing First-choice goalkeeper Carl Ikeme has not played since announcing in July that he had been diagnosed with acute leukemia.
Debuts Nigeria failed to get Tammy Abraham to give up his England career.

Oluwashina Okeleji

Finish...John Ogu (no19) celebrates his goal against Algeria

Advanced... Jon Obi Mikel

AFRICAN QUALIFICATION

SECOND ROUND

13.11.15	Swaziland 0	**0 Nigeria**
17.11.15	**Nigeria 2**	0 Swaziland

3rd rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	6	4	2	0	12	4	14
Zambia	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Cameroon	6	1	4	1	7	9	7
Algeria	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

09.10.16	Zambia 1	**2 Nigeria**
12.11.16	**Nigeria 3**	1 Algeria
01.09.17	**Nigeria 4**	0 Cameroon
04.09.17	Cameroon 1	**1 Nigeria**
07.10.17	**Nigeria 1**	0 Zambia
10.11.17	Algeria 1	**1 Nigeria**

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHT GAMES
Abdullahi SHEHU (6+2)
SEVEN
Elderson ECHIEJILE (6+1), Ogenyi ONAZI (7)
SIX
Kalechi IHEANACHO (4+2), Jon Obi MIKEL (6), Ahmed MUSA (3+3), Wilfred NDIDI (5+1), Moses SIMON (6), William TROOST-EKONG (6)
FIVE
Leon BALOGON (5), Odion IGHALO (5),
FOUR
Ikechukwu ENZENWA (4), Alex IWOBI (3+1), Victor MOSES (4)
THREE
Mikel ABU (0+3), Oghenekaro ETEBO (2+1), Carl IKEME (3)
TWO
Ola AINA (1+1), Efe AMBROSE (2), Sylvester IGBOUN (2), Obafemi MARTINS (0+2), Kenneth OMERUO (2)
ONE
Chima AKAS (1), Daniel AKPEYI (1), Ezekiel BASSEY (0+1), Anderson ESITI (0+1), Rabiu IBRAHIM (0+1), Brown IDEYE (1), Anthony NWAKAEME (1), Godfrey OBOABONA (1), Austin OBOROAKPO (1), John OGU (1), Paul ONOBI (1), Henry ONYEKURU (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
3 goals... Victor Moses
2... Kalechi Iheanacho, Alex Iwobi, Jon Obi Mikel, Moses Simon
1... Efe Ambrose, Odion Ighalo, Jon Ogu

The unanswered questions

Could Nigeria go further than any other African country has gone before at a finals?
No African team has made the last four at a World Cup and it has always been supposed that Nigeria, with its population of some 190million, would be the first. This squad, however, might not be the one to do so.

Will Nigeria change their goalkeeper before the World Cup?
Carl Ikeme's absence left a void which Ikechuwku Ezenwa did not look capable of filling in the later stage of qualifying. This could see a return for Vincent Enyeama, who retired from the national team after a spat with previous coach Sunday Oliseh.

Potential return... Vincent Enyeama

Will they be properly prepared?
For the first time, Nigeria look to have a proactive administration. They have already had a friendly in Russia, where they beat Argentina, and they also managed to persuade CAF to postpone their 2019 African Nations Cup qualifier in the Seychelles in March so that they can get themselves some more testing preparation before the World Cup finals.

Who could make a late push for inclusion for the squad?
Strikers Emmanuel Dennis of Club Brugge and Midtjylland's Paul Onuachu are among the top scorers in the league in Belgium and Denmark this season.

Maiden voyage

Canaleros prepare for finals debut

After going agonisingly close four years ago, Panama finally booked their first ticket to a World Cup by finishing third in the CONCACAF qualifying group after a dramatic victory against Costa Rica. With a team more hard working than talented, and players who have been playing together for a long time, the *Canaleros* hope the draw will be kind and allow them to get at least a point at their debut finals.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** A goal from Fidel Escobar earns a surprise victory in Honduras at the start of the fifth round.
- **Mar 2016:** After a good draw with Mexico, the team begins to stutter. A defeat in Trinidad & Tobago and a draw at home to the USA sees Panama lose the advantage over the rest of the pack that they had acquired in the opening games.
- **Sep 2016** A 3-0 victory against Honduras breaks a six-game winless streak that had taken them from third to fifth place in the group. But a month later, a 4-0 loss in the US means they have to win their final game against Costa Rica and hope Honduras and the Americans lose.
- **Nov 2016:** The miracle happens. A goal by Blas Perez – which never crossed the line – and another by Roman Torres in the dying minutes gives Panama a 2-1 victory over Costa Rica.

THE COACH

Hernan Dario Gomez, age 61 (03.02.61)
Appointed in February 2014, the Colombian has become an expert in South America and CONCACAF qualification, having previously booked a ticket with Colombia in 1998 and Ecuador in 2002. His record in the tournament is less successful, having been twice eliminated in the first round.

THE PLAYERS

Stars There aren't too many standout players in the squad, but if you have to choose one it would be captain Roman Torres, who scored the goal that clinched qualification. Known as "Mazinger" because his body resembles that of a wrestler more than a footballer, he embodies the team virtue of determination rather than skill.
Stalwarts The spine of the team has been the same for at least eight years, with goalkeeper Jaime Penedo, defender Felipe Baloy, midfielder Gabriel Gomez, and strikers Blas Perez, Armando Cooper and Luis Tejada.
Missing Tragically, midfielder Amilcar Henriquez was killed in a robbery in April 2017. Aged 33 and with 84 caps, he was an essential part of coach Gomez's system.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

Spine...Gabriel Gomez

Miracle...Blas Perez

CONCACAF QUALIFICATION

4th rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	5	1	0	11	3	16
Panama	6	3	1	2	7	5	10
Haiti	6	1	1	4	2	4	4
Jamaica	6	1	1	4	2	10	4

13.11.15	Jamaica 0	2 Panama
17.11.15	Panama 1	2 Costa Rica
25.03.16	Haiti 0	0 Panama
29.03.16	Panama 1	0 Haiti
02.09.16	Panama 2	0 Jamaica
06.09.16	Costa Rica 3	1 Panama

5th Round	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	10	6	3	1	16	7	21
Costa Rica	10	4	4	2	14	8	16
Panama	10	3	4	3	9	10	13
Honduras	10	3	4	3	13	19	13
USA	10	3	3	4	17	13	12
Trinidad & T	10	2	0	8	7	19	6

11.11.16	Honduras 0	1 Panama
15.11.16	Panama 2	0 Mexico
24.03.17	Trinidad & T 1	0 Panama
28.03.17	Panama 2	1 USA
08.06.17	Costa Rica 0	0 Panama
13.06.17	Panama 2	2 Honduras
01.09.17	Mexico 1	0 Panama
05.09.17	Panama 3	0 Trinidad & T
06.10.17	USA 4	0 Panama
10.10.17	Panama 2	1 Costa Rica

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

FIFTEEN GAMES
Alberto QUINTERO (14+1)
FOURTEEN
Armando COOPER (10+4), Anibal GODOY (13+1), Gabriel GOMEZ (13+1)
THIRTEEN
Blas PEREZ (10+3)
TWELVE
Adolfo MACHADO (12), Jaime PENEDO (12)
ELEVEN
Felipe BALOY (10+1), Luis OVALLE (10+1), Edgar BARCENAS (9+2), Gabriel TORRES (7+4)
TEN
Luis TEJADA (4+6)
NINE
Fidel ESCOBAR (7+2), Roman TORRES (9)
EIGHT
Abdiel ARROYO (1+7), Amilcar HENRIQUEZ (3+5)
FIVE
Amir MURILLO (4+1), Valentin PIMENTEL (4+1)
FOUR
Jose CALDERON (4), Eric DAVIS (2+2), Roderick MILLER (3+1)
THREE Richard DIXON (3)
TWO Ricardo BUITRAGO (2), Roberto CHEN (1+1), Harold CUMMINGS (2), Ismael DIAZ (1+1), Luis HENRIQUEZ (2), Roberto NURSE (2)
ONE Miguel CAMARGO (1), Jose GONZALEZ (0+1), Tony TAYLOR (0+1), Manuel VARGAS (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
3 goals... Gabriel Torres,
2... Abdiel Arroyo, Luis Tejada, Roman Torres, own goal
1... Felipe Baloy, Armando Cooper, Fidel Escobar, Gabriel Gomez, Blas Perez

The unanswered questions

Will Hernan Dario Gomez dare to make changes?
Of the team that started the decisive match against Costa Rica, only three – Fidel Escobar (22), Edgar Barcenas (24) and Anibal Godoy (27) – were under 29. But while the coach's commitment to experience may have paid off against regional opponents, a lack of pace could be a handicap against more powerful opposition.

Youth...Fidel Escobar

What to do with Felipe Baloy?
For years he has been a rock in the defence. But relegated to the bench for the Costa Rica game, it is pertinent to ask whether, at 36, he can still contribute.

Will the team be able to compete in the World Cup?
After booking their ticket, the prevalent feeling is that the team have done the hard part. The hope now is that they arrive in Russia with sufficient motivation to pull off an upset like Costa Rica did four years ago.

A stroke of luck

Fortune favours Gareca's charges

Seventy eight years after Peru last went 10 games unbeaten, they repeated the feat. And this time their prize was not a first Copa America crown but a return to the World Cup after 36 years. Their route to a first finals since 1982 was as dramatic as it was unexpected. Halfway through the campaign they seemed doomed to yet another dismal failure, but a stroke of luck helped Ricardo Gareca's side gain confidence and momentum, before making it through after two nervy play-off games against New Zealand.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** A 2-0 loss away to Bolivia is later awarded as a 3-0 victory to the visitors after Paraguayan-born sub Nelson Cabrera is later deemed ineligible. As a result, Peru win their first qualifier away from home in more than 12 years.
- **Aug 2017** In the return at home to Bolivia, Peru go 2-0 up but then suffer a crisis of nerves. Bolivia get one back and then miss a sitter in the final minute.
- **Oct 2017** A goal down to Colombia in their last game and on their way out, opposing keeper David Ospina tries to save Paolo Guerrero's indirect free-kick and touches the ball as it flies into the net. Had it gone straight in it would not have counted.
- **Nov 2017** Leading 1-0 at home to New Zealand but fearful of conceding a fateful away goal, Christian Ramos scoops the ball into the net to settle matters.

THE COACH

Ricardo Gareca, age 59 (10.02.58)
The Argentinian took over in 2015 and his greatest virtue has been to bring calm to an environment prone to despair. He has identified a young group of players with potential and stuck by them until poor results turned to good ones.

THE PLAYERS

Stars The big success story of the campaign was Edison Flores, a versatile midfielder who was the side's joint-top scorer with five goals. Pedro Gallese was impressive when called upon and signals the end of the days when Peru needs to nationalise Argentinian goalkeepers.
Stalwart Veteran striker Jefferson Farfan was discarded after the fifth round, but came back for the final few rounds, and stepped up well to cover the absence of Paolo Guerrero in the play-offs.
Missing Captain and centre-forward Guerrero is the country's all-time record scorer but sat out the play-offs after failing a drug test.
Debuts Holding midfielder Renato Tapia made his senior bow in Gareca's first game in charge and grew in stature during the campaign.

Tim Vickery

Versatile... Edison Flores

Stepped up...Farfan

S AMERICAN QUALIFICATION

Group	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

08.10.15	Colombia 2	0 Peru
13.10.15	Peru 3	4 Chile
13.11.15	Peru 1	0 Paraguay
17.11.15	Brazil 3	0 Peru
24.03.16	Peru 2	2 Venezuela
29.03.16	Uruguay 1	0 Peru
01.09.16	Bolivia 0	3 Peru
06.09.16	Peru 2	1 Ecuador
06.10.16	Peru 2	2 Argentina
11.10.16	Chile 2	1 Peru
10.11.16	Paraguay 1	4 Peru
15.11.16	Peru 0	2 Brazil
23.03.17	Venezuela 2	2 Peru
28.03.17	Peru 2	1 Uruguay
31.08.17	Peru 2	1 Bolivia
05.09.17	Ecuador 1	2 Peru
05.10.17	Argentina 0	0 Peru
10.10.17	Peru 1	1 Colombia
PLAY-OFFS		
11.11.17	New Zealand 0	0 Peru
15.11.17	Peru 2	0 New Zealand

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHTEEN GAMES Christian CUEVA (18)
SEVENTEEN Paolo GUERRERO (16+1)
SIXTEEN Pedro GALLESE (16+0), Renato TAPIA (15+1)
FIFTEEN Yoshimar YOTUN (13+2)
FOURTEEN Edison FLORES (12+2)
THIRTEEN Christian RAMOS (12+1), Alberto RODRIGUEZ (13), Miguel TRAUCO (13)
TWELVE Aldo CORZO (12), Raul RUIDIAZ (3+9)
ELEVEN Andre CARRILLO (10+1)
NINE Luis ADVINCULA (8+1), Andy POLO (4+5)
EIGHT Pedro AQUINO (3+5), Jefferson FARFAN (8)
SEVEN Paolo HURTADO (1+6), Carlos LOBATAN (5+2)
SIX Carlos ASCUES (6), Carlos ZAMBRANO (6)
FIVE Josepmir BALLON (3+2), Yordy REYNA (1+4)
FOUR Miguel ARUJA (2+2), Claudio PIZARRO (4)
THREE Segio PENA (1+2), Joel SANCHEZ (0+3)
TWO Luis ABRAM (2), Irven AVILA (2), Cristian BENAVENTO (2), Carlos CACEDA (2), Wilder CARTAGENA (0+2), Beto DA SILVA (0+2), Cristofer GONZALES (0+2), Nilson LOYOLA (1+1), Diego PENNY (2), Juan VARGAS (2)
ONE Adan BALBIN (0+1), Jair CESPEDES (1), Cesar ORTIZ (1), Renzo REVOREDO (0+1), Anderson SANTAMARIA (0+1), Adrian ZELA (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
5 goals... Edison Flores, Paolo Guerrero
4... Christian Cueva, Jefferson Farfan
2... Christian Ramos
1... Andre Carrillo, Paolo Hurtado, Raul Ruidiaz, Renato Tapia, own goal

The unanswered questions

Will there be a recall for 39-year-old Claudio Pizarro?
With the uncertainty over Paolo Guerrero following his drugs ban, and with no other proven target man to play up front, Peru may be tempted to recall their former captain, who was on standby for the play-off second leg against New Zealand.

Drug doubt... Paolo Guerrero

Will the squad's lack of World Cup experience tell in Russia?
None of the current squad were born the last time Peru played at a finals. In the past, several Latin American teams with limited experience in this situation have been overawed, starting slowly and then waiting until it was too late to show their best football.

Can they defend in the air?
Physically imposing centre-forwards are likely to cause problems, with big New Zealand striker Chris Wood causing panic in the Peruvian defence in the play-offs.

Problems at the back are a worry

Lewandowski is on fire, but defence is weak

Back at the World Cup finals after a 12-year absence, expectations are high after the euphoria of reaching the Euro quarter-finals in France last year. However, September's 4-0 loss to Denmark – Poland's worst defeat in a competitive game for 15 years – and a total of 14 goals conceded in qualifying (the most of any team finishing in the top two in a European group) provide a dose of realism.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2016** After a 2-2 draw in Kazakhstan, things get back on track with wins over Denmark and Armenia.
- **Mar 2017** A 2-1 victory in Montenegro puts Poland top of their qualifying group at the halfway stage.
- **Sep 2017** A 4-0 loss to Denmark reduces their lead at the top to three points with three games to play.
- **Oct 2017** Two late goals secure a 4-2 win at home to Montenegro and confirm Poland as group E winners.

THE COACH

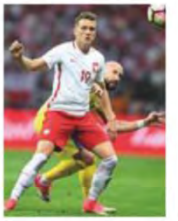
Adam Nawalka, age 60 (23.10.57)
Appointed in October 2013 and on a contract until the end of the finals. Leo Beenhakker's assistant for a year when the national team qualified for Euro 2008, his biggest solo successes have been winning the Polish title with Wisla Krakow and guiding the national side to the knockout stage of Euro 2016. A former midfielder with Wisla, he played for Poland at the 1978 finals.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Robert Lewandowski confirmed his world-class ability as the top scorer in the qualifying campaign with 16 goals.
Stalwarts Centre-back Kamil Glik was a rock at the heart of the defence, while right-back Lukasz Piszczek showed his potential in attack by scoring the winner against Montenegro in March. Playmaker Piotr Zielinski has become a key performer for the team.
Missing Midfielder Bartosz Kapustka, once described as the country's most promising youngster, was not called up for a year as he was not playing regular club football at Leicester City and then Freiburg. Arkadiusz Milik missed much of the campaign through injury.
Debuts Striker Kamil Wilczek played against Armenia, while midfielder Maciej Makuszewski got a game away to Denmark. Defender Jan Bednarek won his first cap at home to Kazakhstan.

Dariusz Kurowski

World class...Robert Lewandowski


Playmaker... Piotr Zielinski

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	10	8	1	1	28	14	25
Denmark	10	6	2	2	20	8	20
Montenegro	10	5	1	4	20	12	16
Romania	10	3	4	3	12	10	13
Armenia	10	2	1	7	10	26	7
Kazakhstan	10	0	3	7	6	26	3

04.09.16	Kazakhstan 2	2 Poland
08.10.16	Poland 3	2 Denmark
11.10.16	Poland 2	1 Armenia
11.11.16	Romania 0	3 Poland
26.03.17	Montenegro 1	2 Poland
10.06.17	Poland 3	1 Romania
01.09.17	Denmark 4	0 Poland
04.09.17	Poland 3	0 Kazakhstan
05.10.17	Armenia 1	6 Poland
08.10.17	Poland 4	2 Montenegro

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFIERS

TEN GAMES
Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI (9+1), Robert LEWANDOWSKI (10), Piotr ZIELINSKI (10)
NINE GAMES
Lukasz FABIANSKI (9), Kamil GLIK (9), Kamil GROSICKI (9), Lukasz PISZCZEK (9),
SEVEN GAMES
Grzegorz KRYCHOWIAK (6+1), Karol LINETTY (5+2), Krzysztof MACZYNSKI (5+2), Michal PAZDAN (7)
SIX GAMES
Artur JEDRZEJCZYK (6)
FIVE GAMES
Thiago CIONEK (3+2), Arkadiusz MILIK (3+2), Maciej RYBUS (3+2), Lukasz TEODORCZYK (1+4)
THREE GAMES
Maciej MAKUSZEWSKI (1+2), Slawomir PESZKO (0+3)
TWO GAMES
Bartosz BERESZYNSKI (2), Bartosz KAPUSTKA (1+1), Rafal WOLSKI (0+2)
ONE GAME
Jan BEDNAREK (0+1), Bartosz SALAMON (1), Wojciech SZCZESNY (1), Kamil WILCZEK (0+1), Pawel WSZOLEK (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
16 goals... Robert Lewandowski
3... Kamil Grosicki
2... own goals
1... Jakub Blaszczykowski, Kamil Glik, Bartosz Kapustka, Krzysztof Maczynski, Arkadiusz Milik, Lukasz Piszczek, Rafal Wolski

The unanswered questions

Who would replace Robert Lewandowski if he gets injured?
Quite simply, there is no such player. The Bayern Munich striker was out with a muscle injury in October but this was later found to be due to exhaustion. Poland will need him fully fit in the summer.

Who will play at left-back?
Like his predecessors as coach, Nawalka is still looking for a natural left-footed player for what has been a problem position for some time. The likeliest candidate at the moment would seem to be Sampdoria's right-back Bartosz Bereszynski.

Candidate...Bartosz Bereszynski

Will Nawalka introduce a new playing system?
Instead of going with his favoured 4-2-3-1 or 4-4-2 set-up, he tried out a new 3-5-2 formation in November's friendlies against Uruguay and Mexico. It is, however, too early to say whether he will use this system in Russia.

Are there likely to be any late additions to the squad for Russia?
After the last qualifier against Macedonia, Robert Lewandowski said "the team needs new blood". But despite the coaching staff regularly monitoring a few dozen potential candidates there is a big problem with finding real replacements who are ready to play at international level. The squad's lack of depth may be the team's biggest problem.

A golden age

Selecao at the top of their game

Spearheaded by the irrepressible Cristiano Ronaldo – just the 15 goals for the captain in nine World Cup qualifiers – Portugal's near faultless campaign of nine wins in 10 games only confirmed that the *Selecao* are experiencing a golden age.

Coach Fernando Santos has won all but one of the 17 qualifying matches that Portugal have played since he took the reins in September 2014, with the small matter of a European Championship triumph in the middle.

In what will be Ronaldo's last shot at leading his country to the ultimate prize, Portugal travel to Russia in optimistic mood, although there are concerns about younger alternatives for central defenders Pepe, Jose Fonte and Bruno Alves – who have a combined age of over 100 years.

KEY EVENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** Without the injured Ronaldo, the newly-crowned European Champions are brought back down to earth with a bump as Switzerland register a thoroughly deserved 2-0 victory in Basle.
- **Oct 2016** Andre Silva becomes the youngest player ever to score a hat-trick for Portugal as they win 6-0 away to Faroe Islands.
- **Sep 2017** A scrappy Andre Silva goal gives Portugal victory in a bad-tempered match in Budapest to effectively set up a decider against Switzerland.
- **Oct 2017** A surprisingly straight-forward 2-0 triumph over the Swiss in Lisbon sees Portugal overtake their opponents at the top of the group and book their place in Russia.

THE COACH

Fernando Santos, age 63 (10.10.54)
Having replaced Paulo Bento, it is now three years at the helm for a man who can rightly be considered as the best coach in Portugal's history. His current contract runs until 2020.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Andre Silva announced himself in style, scoring nine goals and forming a lethal partnership with Ronaldo.
Stalwarts Pepe remains the bedrock of Portugal's defence, while Ricardo Quaresma and Joao Moutinho continue to make key contributions. For all three, Russia will be their final chance of World Cup glory.
Missing Raphael Guerreiro, who missed much of the qualifying campaign, has proved himself to be a clone of his predecessor at left-back Fabio Coentrao: brilliant whenever he plays but extremely injury-prone.
Debuts Goncalo Guedes made two appearances in 2015 as an 18-year-old and returned to the side this year.

Tom Kundert

Irrepressible... Cristiano Ronaldo

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	10	9	0	1	32	4	27
Switzerland	10	9	0	1	23	7	27
Hungary	10	4	1	5	14	14	13
Faroe Islands	10	2	3	5	4	16	9
Latvia	10	2	1	7	7	18	7
Andorra	10	1	1	8	2	23	4

06.09.16	Switzerland 2	0 Portugal
07.10.16	Portugal 6	0 Andorra
10.10.16	Faroe Islands 0	6 Portugal
13.11.16	Portugal 4	1 Latvia
25.03.17	Portugal 3	0 Hungary
09.06.17	Latvia 0	3 Portugal
31.08.17	Portugal 5	1 Faroe Islands
03.09.17	Hungary 0	1 Portugal
07.10.17	Andorra 0	2 Portugal
10.10.17	Portugal 2	0 Switzerland

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TEN GAMES
Rui PATRICIO (10), Andre SILVA (9+1)
NINE GAMES
JOAO MARIO (7+2), Ricardo QUARESMA (4+5), Cristiano RONALDO (8+1)
EIGHT GAMES
William CARVALHO (7+1), Jose FONTE (8), Joao MOUTINHO (6+2), PEPE (8)
SEVEN GAMES
Andre GOMES (5+2), Bernardo SILVA (5+2),
SIX GAMES
Gelson MARTINS (3+3), Cedric SOARES (6)
FIVE GAMES
Raphael GUERREIRO (5)
FOUR GAMES
ELISEU (3+1)
THREE GAMES
Bruno ALVES (3), Vitorino ANTUNES (1+2), Joao CANCELO (3), DANILO (2+1), NANI (2+1),
TWO GAMES
EDER (1+1), Nelson SEMEDO (1+1)
ONE GAME
Fabio COENTRAO (1), Goncalo GUEDES (0+1), Luis NETO (1), Nelson OLIVEIRA (0+1), PIZZI (0+1), Renato SANCHES (0+1), Adrien SILVA (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
15 goals... Cristiano Ronaldo
9... Andre Silva
2... Joao Cancelo, William Carvalho
1... Bruno Alves, Joao Moutinho, Nelson Oliveira, own goal

Rising star... Andre Silva

The unanswered questions

Have enough of the side had sufficient playing time this term?
While the current crop of young Portuguese talent has undoubtedly got potential, few can be considered regular starters for their club sides. What will time spent on the bench do for the match fitness and confidence levels of Andre Silva (Milan), Joao Mario (Internazionale) and Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)?

Options...Bernardo Silva

Will a lethal strike-force take its qualifying form to Russia?
For years Portugal struggled for a reliable goalscoring centre-forward, but that search looks to be over as Andre Silva has started his international career in spectacular fashion and has great chemistry with Ronaldo – they shared 24 goals in qualifying.

How will Santos use Bernardo Silva?
Silva is widely acknowledged as the biggest talent to come out of Portugal since Ronaldo, but Santos has struggled to get the best out of him. Wide right in a flat and narrow 4-4-2 is his usual position, but many are calling for the coach to implement a diamond formation with Silva at the attacking tip.

Can Goncalo Guedes force his way into the side?
The Valencia player has been sensational in La Liga this season and adds interesting options for Portugal, either as a left-sided attacking midfielder, a winger or centrally as a support striker.

Old guard in decline

Lack of young talent may create problems

With no qualifiers to play, hosts Russia have been desperately looking for sparring partners – even playing a friendly against club side Dynamo Moscow in September. Things only became easier when the top European and South American teams had finished their qualifying campaigns, with Argentina coming to Moscow and Spain visiting Saint Petersburg in November, and friendlies against Brazil and France planned for March. Stanislav Cherchesov is trying to build a new squad after his predecessor Leonid Slutsky's unimpressive Euro 2016 outing. In the absence of top-quality players and the departure of a number of the old guard, Cherchesov has had to look increasingly at young talent, although such players are scarce and lack experience. Fans eagerly awaiting next summer's tournament are more sceptical about the team's chances than ever before. Qualifying from their group would be seen as a good result for the hosts.

Replacement... Stanislav Cherchesov

KEY MOMENTS IN 2016-17

- **Aug 2016** Cherchesov steps in to replace Slutskiy and the team draw 0-0 away to Turkey in his first game.
- **Mar 2017** Russia score two second-half goals to come from behind and earn an impressive 3-3 draw with Belgium at the rebuilt Sochi Olympic Stadium.
- **Jun 2017** The team fails to get out of its group at the Confederations Cup, losing 1-0 to Portugal and 2-1 to Mexico after beating New Zealand 2-0 in the opening game. Despite much speculation Cherchesov retains his job.
- **Nov 2017** Russia concede a late goal from Sergio Aguero and lose 1-0 to Argentina at the reopening of Moscow's Luzhniki Olympic Stadium, which will host the opening game and the World Cup Final next summer.

Opening...losing out to Argentina in Moscow

THE COACH

Stanislav Cherchesov, age 54 (02.09.63)
Appointed in August 2016 on a two-year contract, the former USSR and Russia goalkeeper with 49 caps is a four-time winner of the national championship. He was a key figure for Spartak Moscow in their 1995 Champions League campaign, when they won all six group-stage games, and later won three league titles in Austria with Tirol Innsbruck before ending his playing career back at Spartak. After coaching in Austria he joined Spartak and later worked with Moscow sides Spartak and Dynamo before moving to Poland in 2015 and leading Legia Warsaw to the double.

Confeds Cup...taking on New Zealand

Vet...Igor Akinfeev

THE PLAYERS

Stars Igor Akinfeev remains the first-choice keeper and has proved his top-drawer credentials on numerous occasions. Although prone to injuries, versatile box-to-box midfielder Alan Dzagoyev is also key.
Stalwart Akinfeev has more than 100 caps to his name and is closing in on Sergei Ignashevich's national record of 120 appearances.
Missing Ignashevich, along with Vasili and Alexei Berezutskiy, quit international football and their absence is a major headache for the coach who has had to totally replace his back three.
Debuts Born in Russia, Konstantin Rausch emigrated to Germany as a boy but after caps at under-21 level for his adopted homeland the winger opted to play for Russia. Another newcomer is centre-back Georgiy Dzhikiya.

Victor Gusev

The unanswered questions

Can the new defence cope?
Victor Vasin, Fedor Kudryashov and Georgiy Dzhikiya have all been criticised for technical mistakes and poor positioning in recent games, but it looks as though Cherchesov sees them as his only defensive options for the World Cup.

Will Igor Akinfeev avoid mistakes in crucial games?
Although undoubtedly Russia's best goalkeeper, he has made some costly errors at major tournaments such as the 2014 World Cup and 2017 Confederations Cup.

Recall...Andrei Arshavin

Could Andrei Arshavin be recalled?
Probably the only Russian player to achieve widespread international recognition in the last 15 years, the 36-year-old is now at Kairat in Kazakhstan. Good recent performance prompted Cherchesov to say he does not rule out a recall – in spite of his comparatively poor physical condition.

Will Igor Denisiov make a comeback?
As coach of Dynamo, Cherchesov had a run-in with the defensive midfielder which led to Denisov being banished to the reserves. Since becoming national coach, Cherchesov has not considered calling up Denisov.

Can the domestic league's top strikers take their chances in top international games?
The Premier League's top scorer in 2016 and 2017, Fedor Smolov of Krasnodar and Zenit's Alexander Kokorin have not shone at international level. If in good shape, they will either compete for the lone striker position or form an attacking duet.

Squeezing through

Back in finals but uncertainty over coach

Saudi Arabia used to qualify for World Cups as a matter of course, but failure to make 2010 and 2014 had fans desperate to reach Russia. Led by Bert Van Marwijk (top right), they did. Just. There was some luck along the way, but a last-day victory over an already qualified Japan did the trick and put the Green Falcons above Australia on goal difference. Yet qualification was followed by chaos, as Van Marwijk was replaced by Edgardo Bauza – who then left himself.

KEY EVENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** The opening game against Thailand in Riyadh was proving to be a frustrating experience until the softest of penalties six minutes from the end allowed Nawaf Al Abed to secure the points. Five days later, the midfielder scores twice more from the spot to give the Saudis a come-from behind win against Iraq.
- **Oct 2016** With 11 minutes remaining, Van Marwijk's men are trailing at home to Australia. Then Nasser Al Shamrani strikes to earn what will turn out to be a vital point won.
- **Nov 2016** A 2-1 defeat in Japan prevents Saudi Arabia from breaking free at the top of the group.
- **Sep 2017** Needing to beat Japan at home in the final game to qualify, winger Fahad Al Muwallad makes the second-half difference and the 1-0 victory is celebrated wildly. But days later Van Marwijk announces he is leaving, with Edgardo Bauza replacing him.
- **Nov 2017** After just five games in charge, Argentinian Bauza was sacked as Saudi coach.

THE COACH

Currently vacant

Even by Saudi standards, the recent coaching merry-go-round was shocking. Van Marwijk, who had been in place for two years and was building a solid team, left just days after the Russian deal was sealed. In came Bauza, who had taken over the United Arab Emirates just weeks previously. A month later, the Argentinian had also said his goodbyes.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Nawaf Al Abed was cool and composed throughout the final stage, and he scores as well as creates. When given the opportunity, Fahad Al Muwallad is exciting.

Stalwarts Osama Hawsawi has been in the centre of defence for a long time – although some feel for too long.

Missing Nasser Al Shamrani was Asian Player of the Year in 2014 but he started just one game in qualifying.

The debutants Van Marwijk gave a first call-up to right-back Mohammed Al Burayk and the 25-year-old performed well under pressure.

John Duerden

Exciting...Fahad Al Muwallad takes some stopping

Star...Al Abed

ASIAN QUALIFICATION

2nd rd, Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	8	6	2	0	28	4	20
UAE	8	5	2	1	25	4	17
Palestine	8	3	3	2	22	6	12
Malaysia	8	1	1	6	3	30	4
Timor-Leste	8	0	2	6	2	36	2

11.06.15	Saudi Arabia 3	2 Palestine
03.09.15	Saudi Arabia 7	0 Timor-Leste
08.09.15	Malaysia 0	3 Saudi Arabia
08.10.15	Saudi Arabia 2	1 UAE
09.11.15	Palestine 0	0 Saudi Arabia
17.11.15	Timor-Leste 0	10 Saudi Arabia
24.03.16	Saudi Arabia 2	0 Malaysia
29.03.16	UAE 1	1 Saudi Arabia

3rd rd, Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	10	6	2	2	17	7	20
Saudi Arabia	10	6	1	3	17	10	19
Australia	10	5	4	1	16	11	19
UAE	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Iraq	10	3	2	5	11	12	11
Thailand	10	0	2	8	6	24	2

01.09.16	Saudi Arabia 1	0 Thailand
06.09.16	Iraq 1	2 Saudi Arabia
10.10.16	Saudi Arabia 2	2 Australia
11.10.16	Saudi Arabia 3	0 UAE
15.11.16	Japan 2	1 Saudi Arabia
23.03.17	Thailand 0	3 Saudi Arabia
28.03.17	Saudi Arabia 1	0 Iraq
08.06.17	Australia 3	2 Saudi Arabia
29.08.17	UAE 2	1 Saudi Arabia
05.09.17	Saudi Arabia 1	0 Japan

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHTEEN GAMES
Taiseer AL JASSAM (18), Yahia AL SHERI (17+1), Osama HAWSAWI (18)
SEVENTEEN Salman AL FARAJ (17), Abdulmalek AL KHAIBRI (17)
FOURTEEN
Mohammed AL SAHLAWI (14)
THIRTEEN Nawaf AL ABED (11+2), Omar OTHMAN (13)
TWELVE
Fahad AL MUWALLAD (0+12)
ELEVEN Yasir AL SHAHRANI (11), Abdullah AL ZORI (9+2)
TEN Salman AL MUWASHAR (7+3), Hassan Muath FALLATAH (7+3)
EIGHT Mansour AL HARBI (8), Naif HAZAZI (3+5), Khalid SHARAHILI (8)
SEVEN Yasser AL MOSAILEM (7)
FIVE Yassin AL NAKHLI (5), Nasser AL SHAMRANI (1+4)
THREE Abdulaziz Al JEBREEN (0+3), Hussain AL MOQAHWI (0+3), Abdulwajid AL RUWAILI (0+3), Motaz HAWSAWI (0+3)
TWO Mohammed AL BURAYK (1+1), Saleem AL DAWSARI (1+1), Abdullah AL MAYOUF (2), Abdulfattah ASIRI (0+2), Abdullah OTAYF (1+1)
ONE Muhannad ABU RADIYAH (0+1), Mohammed AL FATIL (0+1), Mohammed AL OWAIS (1), Waleed BAKSHWEEN (0+1), Shaya SHARAHILI (1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
16 goals... Mohammad Al Sahlawi
6... Taisir Al Jassim
5... Nawaf Al Abed, Yahya Al Shehri
4... Fahad Al Muwallad
2... Osama Hawsawi
1... Salem Al Dawsari, Salman Al Faraj, Salman Al Moasher, Nasser Al Shamrani, Naif Hazazi, own goal

The unanswered questions

What effect will the change of coaches have?
Losing the experienced Bert Van Marwijk, who took his homeland to the 2010 Final, was huge. Not only did he know the players, they knew him and his system. Edgardo Bauza barely had time to get to know the squad, but friendly performances against Portugal and Bulgaria ended with much criticism and his departure proves that there are few seats as hot as that of Saudi Arabia's coach.

Long serving... Osama Hawsawi

Is Osama Hawsawi up to the job?
At 33, the centre-back and captain came into the team just after the 2006 World Cup but his ageing legs have been showing a little of late.

What about international exposure?
All the Saudis play at home and this is a problem. There is talk of some being loaned to European clubs, but that won't be easy to arrange.

Shades of 2002 all over again

Coach Cisse will look to Mane for goals

Senegal are back at the World Cup for a second time, after becoming only the second African country to reach the quarter-finals when Japan and South Korea co-hosted in 2002. Drawing his side from a large number of players with clubs in Europe, coach Aliou Cisse – who was captain of the 2002 team – has put together a formidable squad.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2015** Two goals down after an hour of the first leg of their preliminary round tie in Madagascar, Senegal are flirting with shock elimination until they come back to draw the game and then win 5-2 on aggregate.
- **Nov 2016** A 2-1 loss in South Africa sees Senegal submit a protest to FIFA over the officiating as Ghanaian ref Joseph Lamptey awards the hosts a dubious penalty.
- **Mar 2017** Lamptey is found to have manipulated the South Africa result and is banned for life.
- **Sep 2017** After home and away draws against Burkina Faso, FIFA order the disputed South Africa game from November 2016 to be replayed.
- **Nov 2017** Back in South Africa, Sadio Mane is the talisman as Senegal win the replayed match 2-0 and secure qualification with a game to spare.

THE COACH

Aliou Cisse, age 41 (24.03.76)
Took over from Alain Giresse as coach in March 2015, having been captain of the team for Senegal's previous World Cup appearance. After finishing his playing career, he went home to work with the Senegal Football Federation and was on the staff of the under-23 side that participated at the men's football tournament at the London Olympics.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Sadio Mane and Kalidou Koulibaly are among the best African players in Europe and are crucial to the Senegal cause. Koulibaly controls the defence line while Mane lifts the side to a higher level in attack.
Stalwarts Idrissa Gueye and Cheikhou Kouyate are midfielders who provide the back bone of the team.
Missing Mame Biriam Diouf lost his place through injury in the middle of the year and has not been recalled since.
Debuts Former French under-21 international Mbaye Niang has now won three caps for Senegal.

Mark Gleeson

Success...after beating South Africa

Control... Kalidou Koulibaly

AFRICAN QUALIFICATION

SECOND ROUND

13.11.15	Madagascar 2	2 Senegal
17.11.15	Senegal 3	0 Madagascar

Group D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	6	4	2	0	10	3	14
Burkina Faso	6	2	3	1	10	6	9
Cape Verde	6	2	0	4	4	12	6
South Africa	6	1	1	4	7	10	4

08.10.16	Senegal 2	0 Cape Verde
02.09.17	Senegal 0	0 Burkina Faso
05.09.17	Burkina Faso 2	2 Senegal
07.10.17	Cape Verde 0	2 Senegal
11.11.17	South Africa 0	2 Senegal
14.11.17	Senegal 2	1 South Africa

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHT GAMES
Idrissa GUEYE (8), Cheikhou KOUYATE (7+1), Sadio MANE (7+1)
SEVEN
Saliou CISS (5+2), Kara MBODJI (7)
SIX
Kalidou KOULIBALY (6), Cheikh NDOYE (1+5)
FIVE
Lamine GASSAMA (5), Salif SANE (3+2)
FOUR
Keita BALDE (2+2), Moussa KONATE (2+2), Khadim NDIAYE (4), Papa Alioune NDIAYE (3+1), Moussa SOW (3+1), Moussa WAGUE (3+1)
THREE
Abdoulaye DIALLO (3), Mbaye NIANG (2+1)
TWO
Mame DIOUF (2), Alfred NDIAYE (1+1), Opa NGUETTE (1+1), Youssouf SABALY (2), Henri SAIVET (2), Diafra SAKHO (2), Younousse SANKHARE (1+1), Ismaila SARR (2)
ONE
Mohamed DIAME (1), Papa DIOP (0+1), El Hadj DIOUSSE (0+1), Alfred GOMIS (1), Adama MBENGUE (1), Oumar NIASSE (1), Pape Seydou NDIAYE (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
2 goals... Mame Biram Diouf, Sadio Mane, Diafra Sakho
1... Keita Balde, Moussa Konate, Cheikhou Kouyate, Kara Mbodji, Cheikh N'Doye, Opa Nguette, Ismaila Sarr, Moussa Sow, own goal

The unanswered questions

Will Sadio Mane's hamstring hold out in the finals?
If it does not, it will be a big blow to Senegal. However, Liverpool have had a physio travelling with the striker for several recent internationals in Africa to help him to keep properly in shape.

Can Senegal upset some big names, as they did in 2002?
They are the one African side with the potential to shake things up in Russia in much the same way they did in Seoul, when they beat France before going on to reach the quarter-finals.

Assistance... Sadio Mane

Will any locally-based players make Aliou Cisse's squad?
Last time Senegal went to the World Cup, 21 of the 23-man squad were based at French clubs, with one from a Moroccan side and the other at Dakar-based Jeanne d'Arc. This time the players are spread out across Europe, the Middle East and even the USA, but there are no candidates from the domestic league.

Will the team's physical strength be an advantage?
While the pace and finishing prowess of Sadio Mane is Senegal's biggest threat, they also scored several goals from set-pieces in the qualifying campaign and will look to capitalise on such situations again. They will flood the opposing penalty area at every opportunity and try to capitalise on their height and strength.

Who is in charge for finals?

Coach is sacked despite success

Having failed to qualify for the last three major tournaments, Serbia made it to Russia – against all the odds – as group winners. However, it was a mixed campaign, at the end of which the Serbian FA sacked coach Slavoljub Muslin, whose 3-4-3 system was regarded as being too defensive – even though Serbia scored 20 goals.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Oct 2016** Having allowed Austria to twice come from behind in Belgrade, Dusan Tadic scores the winner in a 3-2 victory.
- **Nov 2016** Aleksandar Mitrovic equalises in the 86th minute in Wales before Gareth Bale hits a post for the hosts in a 1-1 draw.
- **Sep 2017** Despite playing for more than 25 minutes with 10 men when centre-back Nikola Maksimovic was sent off, Serbia hold on for a 1-0 win away to Republic of Ireland.
- **Oct 2017** Although they lose 3-2 in Austria, Aleksandar Prijovic's goal against Georgia three days later secures a ticket to Russia.

THE COACH

Mladen Krstajic, age 43 (04.03.74)
Appointed caretaker following Slavoljub Muslin's dismissal, the former centre-back has no experience as a head coach. However, with the Serbian FA's first-choice replacement Dragan Stojkovic out of bounds due to his lucrative long-term contract with Chinese side Guangzhou R&F, he might just get the job full time.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Although his form dropped in the second part of the campaign, Dusan Tadic made a big contribution. Aleksandar Mitrovic is only a reserve at his club side Newcastle, but in the World Cup qualifiers he scored six times, including two crucial equalisers in the two draws with Wales.
Stalwarts The ability of goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic was vital in qualifying, while skipper Branislav Ivanovic showed true leadership despite some ups and downs in his performances. Nemanja Matic is the central figure in midfield.
Missing Muslin constantly ignored midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, claiming he didn't fit into a 3-4-3 system.
Debut A member of the teams that won the 2013 Euro Under-19 and 2015 World Under-20 titles, midfielder Mijat Gacinovic scored on his senior debut in the 3-1 win away to Georgia.

Vladimir Novak

Draw...earning a point in Wales

Scoring debut... Mijat Gacinovic

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	10	6	3	1	20	10	21
Rep Ireland	10	5	4	1	12	6	19
Wales	10	4	5	1	13	6	17
Austria	10	4	3	3	14	12	15
Georgia	10	0	5	5	8	14	5
Moldova	10	0	2	8	4	23	2

05.09.16	Serbia 2	Rep Ireland 2
06.10.16	Moldova 0	Serbia 3
09.10.16	Serbia 3	Austria 2
12.11.16	Wales 1	Serbia 1
24.03.17	Georgia 1	Serbia 3
11.06.17	Serbia 1	Wales 1
02.09.17	Serbia 3	Moldova 0
05.09.17	Rep Ireland 0	Serbia 1
06.10.17	Austria 3	Serbia 2
09.10.17	Serbia 1	Georgia 0

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TEN GAMES
Branislav IVANOVIC (10), Dusan TADIC (10)
NINE GAMES
Nemanja GUDELJ (4+5), Filip KOSTIC (8+1), Luka MILIVOJEVIC (8+1), Aleksandar MITROVIC (9), Antonio RUKAVINA (9)
EIGHT GAMES
Aleksandar KOLAROV (8), Vladimir STOJKOVIC (8)
SEVEN GAMES
Nemanja MATIC (7), Matija NASTOVIC (7)
SIX GAMES
Nemanja MAKSIMOVIC (5+1)
FIVE GAMES
Jagos VUKOVIC (4+1)
FOUR GAMES
Aleksandar KATAI (0+4), Stefan MITROVIC (2+2), Aleksandar PRIJOVIC (0+4)
THREE GAMES
Mijat GACINOVIC (2+1), Adem LLAJIC (1+2), Zoran TOSIC (1+2)
TWO GAMES
Ivan OBRADOVIC (2), Andrija PAVLOVIC (1+1), Predrag RAJKOVIC (2)
ONE GAME
Ljubomir FEJSA (1), Filip MLADENOVIC (1), Nemanja RADOJA (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
6 goals... Aleksandar Mitrovic
4... Dusan Tadic
2... Mijat Gacinovic, Aleksandar Kolarov, Filip Kostic
1... Bransislav Ivanovic, Nemanja Matic, Luka Milivojevic, Aleksandar Prijovic

The unanswered questions

Who will score the goals if Aleksandar Mitrovic is injured, suspended or out of shape?
If he stays with Newcastle, where he is consigned to the bench, it's a question of whether the centre-forward will be ready for Russia. Aleksandar Prijovic scored the winning goal against Georgia but he is still a newcomer in this team, while Andrija Pavlovic would probably be punching above his weight.

Creative...Sergej Milinkovic-Savic

Can the defence become more solid?
Ignoring the games against an inferior Moldova side, Serbia conceded 10 goals in eight games – almost all of which came after defensive errors.

Is there a plan B?
Far too often Serbia seem over reliant on Dusan Tadic and they can look clueless when opponents manage to shackle him. Caretaker coach Mladen Krstajic has given creative players Adem Ljajic and Sergej Milinkovic-Savic their chance and their inclusion could resolve this problem.

Can Serbia overcome the mental blocks of their teams in the past?
The fear is that the big stage will prove too much for Serbia once again next summer. If they want to enjoy a good World Cup they must avoid freezing when it matters most.

Scrapping through

Coaching change did little to improve results

South Korea qualified for Russia, but that is about the only positive thing that can be said about the final round of the campaign. In their 10 games the Taeguk Warriors won just four and picked up a single point in five games on the road. That they qualified says as much about the failings of others as it does about Korea.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Nov 2016** Koo Ja-cheol scores with five minutes left to give Korea, smarting from defeat by Iran, a come-from-behind win against Uzbekistan.
- **Mar 2017** There is massive pressure on coach Uli Stielike after Korea lose in China – a first competitive defeat against their neighbours.
- **Jun 2017** Stielike is fired after Korea lose 3-2 to bottom team Qatar, in which serious injuries to Son Heung-min and Ki Sung-yeung make matters worse.
- **Sep 2017** Under new coach Shin Tae-yong, Korea have to win in Uzbekistan, but they draw 0-0. The players wait on pitch for news that Syria haven't won in Iran before the celebrations can begin.

THE COACH

Shin Tae-yong, age 48 (11.04.69)
A tough-tackling midfielder who led Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma to victory in the 2010 Asian Champions League after retiring. In charge of Korea's team at the 2016 Olympics and the 2017 Under-20 World Cup – tournaments that started well before ending in disappointment.

THE PLAYERS

Star Son Heung-min is the focus of the team's attacking efforts.
Stalwarts Approaching 100 caps, midfielder Ki Sung-yeung is a calming influence. Koo Ja-cheol offers aggression and goals from midfield when fit.
Missing Lee Chung-yong didn't appear in any qualifiers this year as a lack of playing time with Crystal Palace in England hurt his chances.
Debut There are high hopes for busy striker Hwang Hee-chan who has settled into life in Europe with Red Bull Salzburg.

John Duerden

High hopes... Hwang Hee-chan

ASIAN QUALIFICATION

2nd Rd: Group G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	8	8	0	0	27	0	24
Lebanon	8	3	2	3	12	6	11
Kuwait	8	3	1	4	12	10	10
Myanmar	8	2	2	4	9	21	8
Laos	8	1	1	6	6	29	4

16.06.15	Myanmar 0	2 South Korea
03.09.15	South Korea 8	0 Laos
08.09.15	Lebanon 0	3 South Korea
08.10.15	Kuwait 0	1 South Korea
12.11.15	South Korea 4	0 Myanmar
17.11.15	Laos 0	5 South Korea
24.03.16	South Korea 1	0 Lebanon
-	South Korea v Kuwait (not played; South Korea awarded a 3-0 victory)	

3rd Rd: Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	10	6	4	0	10	2	22
South Korea	10	4	3	3	11	10	15
Syria	10	3	4	3	9	8	13
Uzbekistan	10	4	1	5	6	7	13
China	10	3	3	4	8	10	12
Qatar	10	2	1	7	8	15	7

01.09.16	South Korea 3	2 China
06.09.16	Syria 0	0 South Korea
06.10.16	South Korea 3	2 Qatar
11.10.16	Iran 1	0 South Korea
15.11.16	South Korea 2	1 Uzbekistan
23.03.17	China 1	0 South Korea
28.03.17	South Korea 1	0 Syria
13.06.17	Qatar 3	2 South Korea
31.08.17	South Korea 0	0 Iran
05.09.17	Uzbekistan 0	0 South Korea

Attacking focus... Son Heung-min

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

SIXTEEN GAMES JANG Hyun-soo (16)
FOURTEEN KI Sung-yeung (14)
THIRTEEN KOO Ja-cheol (11+2)
TWELVE LEE Jae-sung (7+5), SON Heung-min (11+1)
NINE HAN Kook-young (7+2), JI Dong-won (8+1), KIM Jin-soo (8+1), KIM Seung-gyo (9), KWAK Tae-hwi (8+1), LEE Chung-young (6+3)
EIGHT JUNG Woo-young (7+1), KIM Young-gwon (7+1), NAM Tae-hee (5+3)
SEVEN HWANG Hee-chan (4+3), SUK Hyun-jun (5+2)
SIX KIM Kee-hee (6), KWON Chang-hoon (5+1), KWON Sun-tae (6)
FIVE HONG Jeong-Ho (5), HWANG Ui-jo (2+3), LEE Jeong-hyeop (3+2)
FOUR KIM Shin-wook (0+4)
THREE CHOI Chul-soon (3), HONG Chul (2+1), KIM Chang-soo (3), OH Jae-suk (3), PARK Joo-ho (3)
TWO HONG Chul (0+2), KIM Bo-kyung (1+1), KOH Myong-jin (2), LEE Dong-gook (0+2), LEE Keun-ho (1+1), LEE Yong (2), YEOM Ki-hun (1+1)
ONE HEO Yong-jun (0+1), JEONG Dong-ho (0+1), JUNG Sung-ryong (1), KIM Jin-Hyeon (1), KIM Min-hyeok (1), KIM Min-jae (1), KIM Min-woo (1), KO Yo-han (1), LEE Yong-jae (0+1), RIM Chang-woo (0+1), YOON Suk-Young (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
7 goals... Son Heung-min
4... Ki Sung-yueng, Koo Ja-cheol,
3... Kwon Chang-hoon, Lee Jae-sung
2... Jang Hyun-soo, Lee Chung-yong, Nam Tae-hee, Suk Hyun-jun, own goal
1... Hong Jeong-ho, Hwang Hee-chan, Ji Dong-won, Lee Jeong-hyeop

The unanswered questions

Who will be in charge?

Ever since qualification was achieved there have been rumours of Guus Hiddink making a return – and they have been favourably received by most of the public. The Dutchman is highly unlikely to return, but Shin Tae-yong will be under pressure if poor results continue.

Work to do... assistant Toni Grande

Will the European-based players get more games with their club sides?

The likes of Lee Chung-yung at Crystal Palace and Ji Dong-won at Augsburg have not appeared much this season and they will need more playing time with their club sides if they are to make the plane to Russia.

Will Toni Grande make a difference?

With many thinking there was a need for some foreign knowhow, former Spain and Real Madrid number two Toni Grande was appointed as assistant in November. And he has much work to do.

A class apart

Lopetegui's side sailed through qualifying

"I wouldn't want to face Spain at the World Cup," said Lionel Messi. And by the end of their qualifying campaign, others must have felt the same way. Spain finished top of their group, and ultimately did so with an authority and assuredness that was unexpected after the way they exited the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Euros. Their progress was virtually secured when they outclassed Italy at the Santiago Bernabeu, going on to collect 28 points and score 36 goals, while conceding just three.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Sep 2016** Hammering Liechtenstein 8-0 may not sound much, but Julen Lopetegui's first game reveals a coach who is thoughtful about tactical shifts and is willing to change things.
- **Sep 2017** Led by Isco, Spain are superb as they beat Italy 3-0 to effectively decide the group.
- **Oct 2017** The Catalan independence referendum, which is declared illegal by the Spanish government, brings conflict to the surface and Gerard Pique is abused when training at Spain's Las Rozas HQ. Later in the month qualification is confirmed with a 1-0 win in Israel.

THE COACH

Julen Lopetegui, age 51 (28.08.66)
Appointed after the last World Cup, the former under-21 coach has quietly made changes to the national team and introduced new variants while reinforcing its essence. He has demonstrated a willingness to open his mind to alternatives and bring in unexpected players, both young and old, and has so far sidestepped the inevitable and often affected "controversies".

THE PLAYERS

Star Watching Isco take Italy apart, and then glide around the Rosaleda in Spain's penultimate game of 2017, it seems incredible to think that he didn't make the final squad in 2014 and 2016. Outstanding this year, he will be the creative heart of the side in 2018.
Stalwart David Silva has always been there, even if he perhaps didn't get the recognition he deserved alongside illustrious team-mates like Iniesta and Xavi. He is the top scorer under Lopetegui, with 11 goals. And Jordi Alba is still around as well, flying up and down the wing, head back and legs whirring.
Missing Diego Costa's move from Chelsea to Atletico Madrid has been delayed by the club's ban on incoming transfers. The deal will finally go through in January, but having played no club football for the past six months he is in a race to get match fit.

Sid Lowe

Impressive...Italy were blown away in September

Flying...Jordi Alba

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	10	9	1	0	36	3	28
Italy	10	7	2	1	21	8	23
Albania	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Israel	10	4	0	6	10	15	12
Macedonia	10	3	2	5	15	15	11
Liechtenstein	10	0	0	10	1	39	0

05.09.16	Spain 8	0 Liechtenstein
06.10.16	Italy 1	1 Spain
09.10.16	Albania 0	2 Spain
12.11.16	Spain 4	0 Macedonia
24.03.17	Spain 4	1 Israel
11.06.17	Macedonia 1	2 Spain
02.09.17	Spain 3	0 Italy
05.09.17	Liechtenstein 0	8 Spain
06.10.17	Spain 3	0 Albania
09.10.17	Israel 0	1 Spain

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

NINE GAMES
Sergio BUSQUETS (9), David DE GEA (9), Sergio RAMOS (9), David SILVA (9)
EIGHT
ISCO (4+4), KOKE (6+2), Gerard PIQUE (8), THIAGO Alcantara (7+1)
SIX
Jordi ALBA (6), Andres INIESTA (6)
FIVE
Dani CARVAJAL (5), Diego COSTA (5), Alvaro MORATA (2+3), NACHO (2+3), VITOLO (5)
FOUR
Marco ASENSIO (2+2), Nacho MONREAL (4)
THREE
Aritz ADURIZ (1+2), Iago ASPAS (0+3), PEDRO (2+1), SAUL Niguez (1+2)
TWO
Jose CALLEJON (0+2), NOLITO (0+2)
ONE
Cesar AZPILICUETA (1), Marc BARTRA (1), Gerard DELAFEU (0+1), Asier ILLARRAMENDI (1), Inigo MARTINEZ (0+1), Alvaro ODRIOZOLA (1), Pepe REINA (1), SERGI ROBERTO (1), RODRIGO (1) Jonathan VIERA (1), David VILLA (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
5 goals... Diego Costa, Isco, Alvaro Morata, David Silva
4... Vitolo
2... Iago Aspas, own goals
1... Aritz Aduriz, Asier Illarramendi, Nacho Monreal, Nolito, Sergio Ramos, Sergi Roberto, Rodrigo, Thiago Alcantara

The unanswered questions

Can they keep up the current form?
After a recent friendly, Costa Rica's coach said of Spain: "They move the ball with one touch and at devilish speed." That will be the key to their game next summer – if they can maintain that speed of circulation at the end of a long season.

Who plays up front?
The short answer is, of course, Alvaro Morata. But Diego Costa is returning. And then there's Rodrigo, who is scoring goals for Valencia and Spain. Against Italy, they played without a fixed striker – something that even Morata, the "victim" of the tactic, said was a good idea.

Victim... Alvaro Morata

Is there room for someone new?
Julen Lopetegui has been very open minded about bringing players in, some call-ups coming seemingly out of the blue, and while the coach has been swift to call on those he worked with at under-21 level, he has also been willing to look beyond those. Even David Villa got a recall.

One "pivot" or two?
While the essence of the team's approach remains the same, Lopetegui made tactical tweaks throughout qualification. Usually, Sergio Busquets has played alongside another midfielder – usually Koke, sometimes Saul, occasionally Thiago – but at times he plays alone with two "interiors" ahead of him to either side.

Zlatan not needed

Andersson's side no longer a one-man team

Amid all the euphoria of their remarkable play-off victory over Italy, it should not be forgotten how impressive Sweden were in the group phase, pipping Holland to the runners-up spot, beating France in Solna and being undefeated at home. Under coach Janne Andersson, they are first and foremost a highly effective defensive unit. The proof? Their seven clean sheets.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

● **Jun 2016** The inimitable Zlatan Ibrahimovic retires from international football. After years of everything revolving around their talismanic superstar, coach Andersson has no other option but to cultivate a greater team ethic.

● **Sep 2016** Sweden's solidity and flair for a counter-attack is there for all to see in a 1-1 draw at home to Holland in the opening qualifier. The Dutch enjoyed the bulk of possession, completed twice as many passes and had far more shots on goal, yet still they could not force the win.

● **Jun 2017** Fighting back from a goal down, they come of age in beating France 2-1. The injury-time winner is scored by striker Ola Toivonen, who plays in France for Toulouse.

● **Nov 2017** Deploying the sort of *catenaccio* tactics that Italian sides used to be famous for, Sweden overcome the *Azzurri* in the play-offs to reach the finals for the first time since 2006.

THE COACH

Janne Andersson, age 55 (20.09.62)
Appointed in June 2016 on a three-year contract, he was brought in to replace Eric Hamren at the end of Sweden's Euro 2016 campaign. He began his coaching career at fourth-tier Alets IK, then took charge at Laholms FK, Halmstads, Orgryte and Norrkoping, leading the latter to the 2015 Swedish title.

THE PLAYERS

Star Attacking midfielder Emil Forsberg is by far the team's most imaginative element, nominally lining up on the left side but constantly looking to cut inside.
Stalwarts Back-four organiser and skipper Andreas Granqvist has been a national-team warrior for a decade. Ola Toivonen's flair can produce game-changing moments.
Missing Scorer of the winning goal against Italy, Jakob Johansson damaged cruciate ligaments in the second leg and could be a doubt for the finals.
Debuts Defensive midfielder Alexander Fransson made his competitive bow in the 1-1 draw with Holland, while striker Samuel Armenteros was handed a short cameo in the 3-2 loss to Bulgaria.

Nick Bidwell

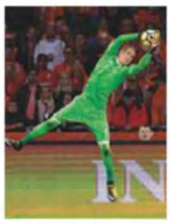
Shock...Italy are knocked out

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Sweden	10	6	1	3	26	9	19
Holland	10	6	1	3	21	12	19
Bulgaria	10	4	1	5	14	19	13
Luxembourg	10	1	3	6	8	26	6
Belarus	10	1	2	7	6	21	5

06.09.16	Sweden 1	1 Holland
07.10.16	Luxembourg 0	1 Sweden
10.10.16	Sweden 3	0 Bulgaria
11.11.16	France 2	1 Sweden
25.03.17	Sweden 4	0 Belarus
09.06.17	Sweden 2	1 France
31.08.17	Bulgaria 3	2 Sweden
03.09.17	Belarus 0	4 Sweden
07.10.17	Sweden 8	0 Luxembourg
10.10.17	Holland 2	0 Sweden
PLAY-OFF		
10.11.17	Sweden 1	0 Italy
13.11.17	Italy 0	0 Sweden

Denied...Robin Olsson keeps Holland out



PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TWELVE GAMES
Emil FORSBERG (12), Andreas GRANQVIST (12), Robin OLSEN (12)
ELEVEN
Marcus BERG (11), Victor LINDELOF (11)
TEN
Ludwig AUGUSTINSSON (9+1), Ola TOIVONEN (9+1)
NINE
Mikael LUSTIG (9), Jakob JOHANSSON (7+2)
EIGHT Viktor CLAESSON (4+4), Jimmy DURMAZ (7+1)
SEVEN Albin EKDAL (7), Seb LARSSON (5+2)
SIX Isaac KIESE THELIN (0+6)
FIVE John GUIDETTI (3+2), Oscar HILJEMARK (4+1)
FOUR Emil KRAFTH (3+1)
THREE Christoffer NYMAN (1+2), Martin OLSSON (2+1), Gustav SVENSSON (0+3)
TWO Alexander FRANSSON (1+1), Pontus JANSSON (1+1), Marcus ROHDEN (1+1), Oscar WENDT (1+1)
ONE Samuel ARMENTEROS (0+1), Filip HELANDER (0+1), Emir KUJOVIC (0+1),

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
8 goals... Marcus Berg
4... Emil Forsberg
3... Andreas Granqvist, Mikael Lustig, Ola Toivonen
1... Jimmy Durmaz, Oscar Hiljemark, Jakob Jakobsson, Isaac Kiese Thelin, Victor Lindelof, Christoffer Nyman

The Unanswered Questions

Would Janne Andersson ever be tempted with a back three?
Hell might freeze over first. A 4-4-2 system is embedded within the soul of the Swedes. It's the system in which they feel the most comfortable and secure.

Is there a risk of first-choice striker Marcus Berg becoming rusty now that he no longer plays his club football in Europe?
Despite moving from Panathinaikos to Al Ain in the UAE in the summer he was impressive against Italy. Andersson loves the front-line blend of Berg and Toivonen, with the former as the forward threat and the latter more likely to come deeper.

Imaginative...Emil Forsberg

Could Zlatan Ibrahimovic make a World Cup comeback ?
Most improbable. Sweden and Andersson have moved on. They have a new style of play and completely different ethic in the camp.

Which players could make a late charge for the squad?
Promising centre-forward Kerim Mrabti has a number of backers, while midfielder Kristoffer Olsson is pushing hard, as is winger Sam Larsson.

If Emil Forsberg was injured, could Sweden cope?
No one else is available with his speed and eye for a killer through ball. The only alternative would be Sam Larsson.

Spot-kick decider

Controversial penalty benefits Petkovic

Switzerland won their first nine qualifiers but were still edged into second place on goal difference by Portugal after they lost 2-0 in Lisbon. They then squeezed through the play-offs, winning 1-0 on aggregate against Northern Ireland. This should be a team at its peak, with a number of key players – such as Ricardo Rodriguez, Fabian Schar, Xherdan Shaqiri, Granit Xhaka and Haris Seferovic – all now in their mid-twenties.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

● **Sep 2016** Fresh from winning the Euro 2016 title, and without the injured Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal are caught off guard in Basle as Switzerland beat them 2-0 in the opening match of the campaign.

● **Oct 2017** Both teams win their next eight games, setting up a showdown in Lisbon. Portugal win comfortably to top the group and send the Swiss into the play-offs.

● **Nov 2017** A controversial penalty, awarded for handball by Corry Evans and scored by Rodriguez, gives Switzerland a 1-0 victory in the first leg of their play-off against Northern Ireland. Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic says the decision was harsh but that his team deserved to win in any case.

● **Nov 2017** Rodriguez again foils Northern Ireland with a clearance off his line in stoppage time in a 0-0 draw that sends Switzerland to Russia.

THE COACH

Vladimir Petkovic, age 54 (15.08.63) Replaced Ottmar Hitzfeld following the 2014 World Cup and led the Swiss to the last 16 at Euro 2016. Before that he coached several Swiss clubs, as well as Lazio in Serie A. Born in the former Yugoslavia, he began his playing career with Sarajevo and won the league in 1985. Spent the rest of his playing career in Switzerland.

THE KEY PLAYERS

Star Xherdan Shaqiri's career has not quite lived up to early expectations, but there is always danger when he gets the ball onto his left foot and he is the Swiss player most likely to conjure up something from nothing.

Stalwarts Yann Sommer has replaced Diego Benaglio in goal. Captain Stephan Lichtsteiner provides an attacking option from right-back, while on the other side Rodriguez is the dead-ball specialist.

Missing Breel Embolo had to sit out most of the campaign after suffering a serious injury during a Bundesliga match with Schalke in October 2016.

Debuts Defender Manuel Akanji and midfielders Remo Freuler and Steven Zuber all came into the side.

Brian Homewood

Skipper...Stephan Lichtsteiner

Incoming... Steven Zuber

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION

Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	10	9	0	1	32	4	27
Switzerland	10	9	0	1	23	7	27
Hungary	10	4	1	5	14	14	13
Faroe Islands	10	2	3	5	4	16	9
Latvia	10	2	1	7	7	18	7
Andorra	10	1	1	8	2	23	4

06.09.16	Switzerland 2	0 Portugal
07.10.16	Hungary 2	3 Switzerland
10.10.16	Andorra 1	2 Switzerland
13.11.16	Switzerland 2	0 Faroe Islands
25.03.17	Switzerland 1	0 Latvia
09.06.17	Faroe Islands 0	2 Switzerland
31.08.17	Switzerland 3	0 Andorra
03.09.17	Latvia 0	3 Switzerland
07.10.17	Switzerland 5	2 Hungary
10.10.17	Portugal 2	0 Switzerland
PLAY-OFFS		
09.11.17	Northern Ireland 0	1 Switzerland
12.11.17	Switzerland 0	0 Northern Ireland

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

TWELVE GAMES
Haris SEFEROVIC (11+1)
ELEVEN
Stephan LICHTSTEINER (11), Admir MEHMEDI (9+2), Fabian SCHAR (11), Yann SOMMER (11), Granit XHAKA (11)
TEN
Xherdan SHAQIRI (10)
NINE Blerim DZEMAILI (9), Ricardo RODRIGUEZ (9)
SEVEN Eren DERDIYOK (1+6), Johan DJOUROU (7), Breel EMBOLO (3+4), Denis ZAKARIA (2+5), Steven ZUBER (4+3)
SIX Gelson FERNANDES (2+4), Remo FREULER (3+3)
FIVE Valon BEHRAMI (5)
FOUR Manuel AKANDJI (4)
THREE Francois MOUBANDJE (3+0), Valentin STOCKER (1+2)
TWO Nico ELVEDI (1+1), Fabian FREI (1+1), Michael LANG (1+1)
ONE Roman BURKI (1), Josip DRMIC (0+1), Timm KLOSE (1), Renato STEFFEN (0+1), Silvan WIDMER (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
4 goals... Haris Seferovic
3... Stephen Lichtsteiner, Ricardo Rodriguez
2... Admir Mehmedi, Granit Xhaka, Steven Zuber
1... Eren Derdiyok, Josip Drmic, Blerim Dzemaili, Breel Embolo, Fabian Frei, Fabian Schar, Xherdan Shaqiri, Valentin Stocker

The unanswered questions

Who will score the goals?
Haris Seferovic started as the lone striker in all but one of Switzerland's qualifiers and managed to score four goals. However, his shooting can be erratic at times, and following his performance against Northern Ireland – particularly after he was jeered during the home game – there now appears to be a question mark over his place in the team.

Star turn... Xherdan Shaqiri

Is Granit Xhaka the real deal?
While Xherdan Shaqiri is the team's star turn, it is their defensive midfielder who makes them tick. Xhaka pulls the strings in midfield with his passing and his anticipation of dangerous situations, although he is also prone to defensive mistakes and giving the ball away.

Who will play alongside Xhaka?
Denis Zakaria was thrown into the two-leg play-off tie against Northern Ireland and made an immediate impression. Switzerland can also call on the veteran Valon Behrami or another relative newcomer Remo Freuler.

Are Switzerland as good as their line-up on paper suggests?
With nearly all of their players based at clubs in Europe's so-called big five leagues, and in the Bundesliga especially, the Swiss squad looks to be potentially one of the strongest at next year's World Cup. But when they faced their stiffest test in the qualifiers they were found wanting, beaten comfortably away by Portugal.

Maaloul oversees latest success

But will coach remain in charge?

Tunisia saw off the Democratic Republic of Congo in two key games over the space of five days and concluded their campaign unbeaten, coming through a preliminary round and then the group phase with six wins from eight games. They had been neck and neck with the fast-improving Congolese before beating them at home and drawing away, despite a change during the campaign, with Polish coach Henryk Kasperczak departing and Nabil Maaloul returning for a second stint in charge.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

- **Feb 2017** Kasperczak leaves after Tunisia limp out against Burkina Faso in the quarter-finals of the African Nations Cup, less than three months after winning the opening two games in their World Cup group.
- **Sep 2017** Ghailene Chaalali scores the winner just after half-time in a 2-1 home victory over DR Congo.
- **Sep 2017** Two goals down away to DR Congo, they fight back with two goals in two minutes to force a draw.
- **Oct 2017** Trailing to a Naby Keita goal in Guinea, Youssef Msakni's hat-trick turns the game on its head and allows the "Cartage Eagles" to start dreaming of a trip to Russia.

THE COACH

Nabil Maaloul, age 55 (25.12.62)
Appointed in March 2017 on a three-year contract, he is in his second spell as national coach, having quit during the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign. Assistant to Roger Lemerre when Tunisia last appeared at the World Cup, in Germany in 2006, he was his country's youngest player at the 1988 Olympics.

THE PLAYERS

Stars Youssef Msakni is the team's creative force. His decision to play in Qatar, for Al Duhail, rather than Europe might have made him wealthy but has denied his talents a wider stage.
Stalwarts Keeper Aymen Mathlouthi, known better as Balbouli, often rescues a plodding defence. Ali Maaloul's runs down the left are key, while Naim Sliti and Ferjani Sassi are stout midfield workers. Wahbi Khazri is a set-piece specialist.
Missing: Defender Aymen Abdennour sat out the last four qualifiers with a hamstring injury.
Debuts: French-born, Belgian-based centre-back Dylan Bronn could break through in the next few months.

Mark Gleeson

Key...Ali Maaloul

Specialist... Wahbi Khazri

AFRICAN QUALIFICATION

SECOND ROUND

13.11.15	Mauritania 1	2 Tunisia
17.11.15	Tunisia 2	1 Mauritania

Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
DR Congo	6	4	1	1	14	7	13
Libya	6	1	1	4	4	10	4
Guinea	6	1	0	5	6	14	3

09.10.16	Tunisia 2	0 Guinea
11.11.16	Libya 0	1 Tunisia
01.09.17	Tunisia 2	1 Congo DR
05.09.17	Congo DR 2	2 Tunisia
07.10.17	Guinea 1	4 Tunisia
11.11.17	Tunisia 0	0 Libya

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

EIGHT GAMES
Ali MALOUL (8), Aymen MATHLOUTHI (8)
SIX GAMES
Mohamed BEN AMOR (6), Wahbi KHAZRI (5+1), Taha KHENISSI (6), Ferjani SASSI (5+1)
FIVE GAMES
Fakhreddine BEN YOUSSEF (2+3), Syam BEN YOUSSEF (5), Yassine MERIAH (5), Hamdi NAGGUEZ (5)
FOUR GAMES
Anice BADRI (1+3), Ghailene CHAALALI (4), Youssef MSAKNI (4)
THREE GAMES
Karim AOUADHI (2+1), Rami BEDOUI (3), Naim SLITI (1+2), Yoann TOUZGHAR (1+2)
TWO GAMES
Aymen ABDENNOUR (2), Anis BEN-HATIRA (1+1), Said BGUIR (0+2), Yassine CHIKHAOUI (2), Chamseddine DHAOUADI (2), Hamdi HARBAOUI (1+1), Anmar JEMAL (2), Hamza MATHLOUTHI (2), Bilel MOHSNI (2), Mohamed MONCER (1+1)
ONE GAME
Ahmed AKAICHI (0+1), Issam BEN KHEMIS (0+1), Zied DERBALI (0+1), Oussama HADDADI (0+1), Hamza LAHMAR (1), Abdelkader OUESLATI (1), Aymen TRABELSI (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
3 goals... Youssef Msakni
2... Wahbi Khazri
1... Aymen Abdennour, Anice Badri, Said Bguir, Mohamed Ben Amor, Anis Ben-Hatira, Syam Ben Youssef, Ghailene Chaalali, Yassine Chikhaoui, Mohamed Moncer, own goal

The unanswered questions

Is there enough experience in the current team?
There are only seven members of the squad who play for teams in Europe and, although club football in Tunisia is among the strongest on the African continent, the lack of depth is a major concern for coach Nabil Maaloul.

Will Maaloul keep his job?
It is not uncommon for local coaches to be dismissed and replaced by high-profile foreign imports in the search for a Midas touch in the build-up to a World Cup.

Temptation... Wissam Ben Yedder

Do they have the requisite ambition?
Qualifying is often the zenith of ambition for countries such as Tunisia and they are happy just to be along for the ride. Tunisia were the first African country to win a World Cup finals game, beating Mexico in Rosario in 1978 on their debut, but in 11 ties since, they have drawn four and lost seven.

Will Wissam Ben Yedder be tempted to switch nationality?
The French-born, 27-year-old Sevilla striker has been one of the standout players in this season's Champions League in Europe and he has already reaffirmed his desire to make the France team. But although previously capped at under-21 level, his chances of going to the World Cup with *Les Bleus* are slim, meaning he might finally give in to Tunisia's frequent pleas to come and play for them, given that his parents are both from the country.

Back on track

Tabarez may consider youthful approach

Uruguay started like a train and then came badly off the rails, with three defeats in the middle of a run of six games with just one win. But with a refreshed midfield they regained momentum and qualified in relative comfort.

KEY MOMENTS IN QUALIFYING

● **Oct 2015** Despite the absence of Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani, they kick off with convincing wins away to Bolivia and at home to Colombia providing a morale-boosting start and a tribute to the depth of the squad.

● **Nov 2015** Still without Suarez, Uruguay are ruthless in their use of set-pieces and with quick, direct attacks they chalk up a comfortable 3-0 win at home to continental champions Chile.

● **Mar 2017** A 2-1 loss to Peru is their third defeat in a row – and on each occasion they had taken the lead. The sudden lack of defensive steel looks a real problem, and it got worse in June's friendlies when they lose 3-1 to the Republic of Ireland and 3-0 to Italy.

● **Sep 2017** A few days after a goalless draw with Argentina, in which Uruguay hardly crossed the halfway line, a 2-1 win away to Paraguay effectively seals qualification.

THE PLAYERS

Star Skilful, dynamic and often controversial, Luis Suarez is the team's main attacking weapon and their biggest hope of glory. The country's all-time top goalscorer is preparing for his third World Cup – and the last he will play close to his peak years.

Stalwarts Edinson Cavani was South America's top scorer in qualification, leading the attacking line when Suarez was missing or playing alongside him and dropping deeper. Team captain Diego Godin is the respected organiser of the defensive line who, although he may be losing a little pace, remains a vital figure and scores important goals.

Missing Just 32 players were used in qualification and most of the old guard are still in and around the squad, with the exception of injury-hit Alvaro Pereira.

Debuts All-round midfielder Federico Valverde was promoted from the under-20 side, bringing quality and controlled possession, and helping to change the characteristics of the side. Along with Rodrigo Bentancur, he represents the start of a generational change.

Tim Vickery

Top scorer... Edinson Cavani

THE COACH

Oscar Tabarez, age 70 (03.03.47)
Appointed for a second spell in charge in March 2006 and is approaching the end of what will surely be the last job of his career. Has put Uruguay back on the map, with his greatest achievement probably overseeing an enormously successful under-20 project.

Impact...Valverde

S AMERICAN QUALIFICATION

Group	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

08.10.15	Bolivia 0	2 Uruguay
13.10.15	Uruguay 3	0 Colombia
12.11.15	Ecuador 2	1 Uruguay
17.11.15	Uruguay 3	0 Chile
25.03.16	Brazil 2	2 Uruguay
29.03.16	Uruguay 1	0 Peru
01.09.16	Argentina 1	0 Uruguay
06.09.16	Uruguay 4	0 Paraguay
06.10.16	Uruguay 3	0 Venezuela
11.10.16	Colombia 2	2 Uruguay
10.11.16	Uruguay 2	1 Ecuador
15.11.16	Chile 3	1 Uruguay
23.03.17	Uruguay 1	4 Brazil
28.03.17	Peru 2	1 Uruguay
31.08.17	Uruguay 0	0 Argentina
05.09.17	Paraguay 1	2 Uruguay
05.10.17	Venezuela 0	0 Uruguay
10.10.17	Uruguay 4	2 Bolivia

PLAYERS USED IN QUALIFYING

SEVENTEEN GAMES
Fernando MUSLERA (17)
SIXTEEN
Diego GODIN (16)
FIFTEEN
Edinson CAVANI (15), Carlos SANCHEZ (14+1)
THIRTEEN
Cristian RODRIGUEZ (10+3), Luis SUAREZ (13)
TWELVE
Edigio AREVALO (11+1), Matias VECINO (11+1)
ELEVEN
Maximiliano PEREIRA (10+1)
TEN
Martin CACERES (8+2)
NINE Sebastian COATES (9), Mathias CORUJO (7+2), Jose GIMENEZ (9), Alvaro GONZELEZ (7+2), Alvaro PEREIRA (4+5), Gaston SILVA (9), Cristhian STUANI (3+6)
EIGHT Nicolas LODEIRO (4+4), Diego ROLAN (4+4)
FIVE Abel HERNANDEZ (2+3), Nahitan NANDEZ (3+2)
FOUR Jorge FUCILE (3+1), Gaston RAMIREZ (1+3)
THREE Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA (1+2), Federico VALVERDE (3)
TWO Rodrigo BETANCUR (1+1), Diego LAXALT (0+2), Mauricio VICTORINO (2)
ONE Camilo MAYADA (0+1), Martin SILVA (1), Jonathan URRETAVISCAYA (0+1)

SCORERS IN QUALIFYING
10 goals... Edinson Cavani
5... Luis Suarez
3... Martin Caceres, Diego Godin
2... Cristian Rodriguez, Diego Rolan
1... Sebastian Coates, Abel Hernandez, Nicolas Lodeiro, Alvaro Pereira, Carlos Sanchez, Federico Valverde, own goal

The unanswered questions

Who will supply Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani?
Oscar Tabarez finally seems to have given up on Gaston Ramirez as a playmaker, so it could fall to current favourite Giorgian De Arrascaeta to open up opposing defences.

Does the defensive unit lack pace?
There is certainly a fear that if the team push up then the defence can be by-passed too easily. Since the 4-1 home defeat by Brazil in March, Tabarez has not chosen Sebastian Coates alongside Diego Godin and has dropped holding midfielder Egidio Arevalo Rios.

Bite...Luis Suarez was banned in the 2014 World Cup

Can Suarez get through a World Cup without picking up a suspension?
In 2010 he missed the semi-final after being sent off for his notorious handball against Ghana. Four years later he rushed back from injury to help Uruguay into the knockout stage but was thrown out of the competition for biting.

eye witness

Samindra Kunti in Kolkata

INDIA

Painful lessons

Hosting a major FIFA tournament gave Indian football a chance to join the elite

Praful Patel was in fine form. The president of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) hosted and attended the FIFA Council and pitched India's bid for the 2019 Under-20 World Cup. He even cracked a joke with FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who praised Patel for introducing FIFA "values" to the local game.

"This is the beginning of the renaissance of Indian football," said Patel on the eve of the Under-17 World Cup Final. "This entire exercise must continue. We have to have another major tournament to keep this momentum. This has been a great learning experience for us. We have now delivered on giving good infrastructure, which over the years was one of the major concerns."

In 2013, FIFA chose India to host the Under-17 World Cup. The Indians were perennial underachievers in international football, but the first major football tournament in the subcontinent was expected to galvanise the local game. The AIFF spent $2.5million on a crash course of exposure and experience tours for its under-17 team, with the "Blue Colts" going to 15 countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Germany, Norway and Iran.

"It was probably the most expensive preparation period in the history of a national junior team," says Richard Hood, the AIFF's head of player development.

India's curtain-raiser with the USA was a mismatch and the visitors outclassed their hosts in every department of the game, running out comfortable 3-0 winners with goals from Josh Sargent, Chris Durkin and Andrew Carleton.

Not that the boys in blue lacked support. For India's opening match, the government snapped up 26,750 tickets and distributed these to selected schools and NGOs across New Delhi to fill up the refurbished Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. To cater to the political class and the VIPs, the hosts' matches were moved from Mumbai to the Indian capital because of high public investment. In all, the central government spent more than €15m upgrading venues in Goa, Guwahati, Kochi and Kolkata, the other host cities. The DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai is privately owned.

The government also took up 22,250 tickets for India's other two matches. In New Delhi basic amenities were, however, in short supply, with food shortages and an acute lack of drinking water. At half-time during the India-USA game those in despair turned to drinking toilet water. In the group stage, Kochi also suffered from similar organisational hitches, leaving many fans thirsty.

Ticketing remained a controversial issue during the tournament. All tickets went up for sale discounting the contractual obligations with various stakeholders, according to a statement from local organisers in response to complaints about empty stands. The tournament still broke the attendance record of 1,230,976 set by China in 1985 at the Under-16 World Championship. In fact, the 1,347,143 fans shattered the record across Under-17 and Under-20 World Cups. Kolkata was the beating heart of the World Cup, with Bengali fans embracing Brazil and, ultimately, England.

In spite of their passionate support. India were eliminated in the group stage, which was a brutal introduction to elite football. The highlight of their campaign

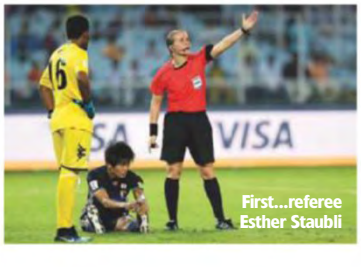
Beginnings...awaiting kick-off in Mumbai

Big numbers... the crowd prior to Colombia's game against Germany

was Jeakson Singh Thounaojam's historic headed goal against Colombia. India's objective was to not get humiliated, but that mindset fell short against the established nations.

The Blue Colts finished bottom of the 24 participating teams. Even New Caledonia, who were World Cup debutants along with Niger, outperformed India with a remarkable 1-1 draw against Japan. Switzerland's Esther Staubli officiated that game to become the first female referee in charge of a men's World Cup match.

"India never had a programme [like the Under-17 team] in the past," says Patel. "One of the reasons for staging the Under-17 World Cup is to re-focus on the grassroots and create that awareness and buzz at a much younger age. The grassroots programme is a mandatory licensing requirement for every team, whether in the ISL [Indian Super League] or whether in the I-League.



First...referee Esther Staubli

"Until a few years back the grassroots programme was very poor. Every player in our under-17 team grew up without playing organised football, except for kickabouts in their village, or whichever way the poor kid could have afforded it."

India's underdeveloped north east provided the bulk of the under-17 squad, with as many as eight players from Manipur. The neighbouring state of Mizoram, which is home to Indian I-League champions Aizawl, was also represented. The region has become the new hot spot of Indian football, with Bengal, Kerala and the south of India, the traditional heartlands, regressing. The Indian team was assembled in an ad-hoc manner. Four players in the squad were attached to Punjab-based Minerva, while third-choice goalkeeper Sunny Dhaliwal plies his trade at Toronto. All the other squad members came from the AIFF's academy.

Hosts...the Dr DY Patil Stadium in Mumbai

Youth development in the domestic game remains minimal, with a huge void at the nursery level. At the senior club level, a merger between the old I-League and the ISL hasn't passed the conception stage either, with IMG-Reliance, the ISL's financial backer, not keen on a unified league. The Bollywood-styled league pays only lip service to youth development.

"The world is sprinting ahead of us based on what happens at the local and

Keen...kids playing in Goa

regional level between ages four to 15," explains Hood. "Development of players needs a certain volume of engagement through real competition under competent guidance from an early age. On this count we fall behind right from the age of four and five and miss out on so many indispensable time windows to address appropriate physiological, neurological, and psychological development that no amount of money, exposure, manufactured talent placements and infrastructure can address at a later stage."

The big boys of Brazil, Mali, England and Spain progressed to the last four of the tournament, but the organisers were left red faced when England's semi-final against Brazil had to be shifted at the last minute from Guwahati to Kolkata due to an unplayable pitch. Torrential rainfall in Assam had reduced the quarter-final between Mali and Ghana to a mud fight, with Mali prevailing 2-1.

"The reality is that no ground would have been able to withstand the rain that had happened," said tournament director Javier Ceppi. "There was a depression in Bangladesh. It rained for 48 hours. It was built to all necessary specifications. But the damage to the ground was so much. If a pitch is damaged, you can recover it in a week. But when you have three days, and it rains again, there is nothing you can do."

Mud bath...Mali (in white) versus Ghana

Selfie...India's Rahim Ali with fans

Plenty of teams struggled with climate conditions. USA, Germany and Mali laboured in the humidity of Kochi, Goa and Mumbai. For the Americans, Tim Weah, the son of former Ballon d'Or winner George Weah, and Carleton impressed. France, among the pre-tournament favourites, exited early with a 2-1 defeat against Spain in the round of 16. African champions Mali were menacing across their frontline with winger Djemoussa Traore and number 10 Salam Jiddou, but were left to lament Cheick Doucoure's disallowed goal in the semi-final against Spain.

> "I have a feeling now that India is a football country"
>
> **FIFA president Gianni Infantino**

Tactically, the majority of teams used a 4-2-3-1 formation, highlighting that even at youth level football has become a flat world with universal styles and influences.

Mali's Lassana N'Diaye, Germany's Jann-Fiete Arp and the United States' Sargent were early contenders for the Golden Boot, but the goalscoring prowess of England's Rhian Brewster and Spain's Abel Ruiz galvanised the latter stages of the World Cup.

In the Final, the "Young Lions" prolonged England's golden year of youth success with delightful top-heavy football and a composure that has so often been lacking at the senior level.

Brewster and Phillip Foden came of age and rightfully won the accolades of top scorer and best player of the tournament. They motored their team to a maiden World Cup win. England's front-line talent and tactical ingenuity trumped Spain, whose elaborate passing game and enduring pragmatism faltered against so much English guile, pace and precision.

At the end of the Under-17 World Cup, Infantino lavished praise on India.

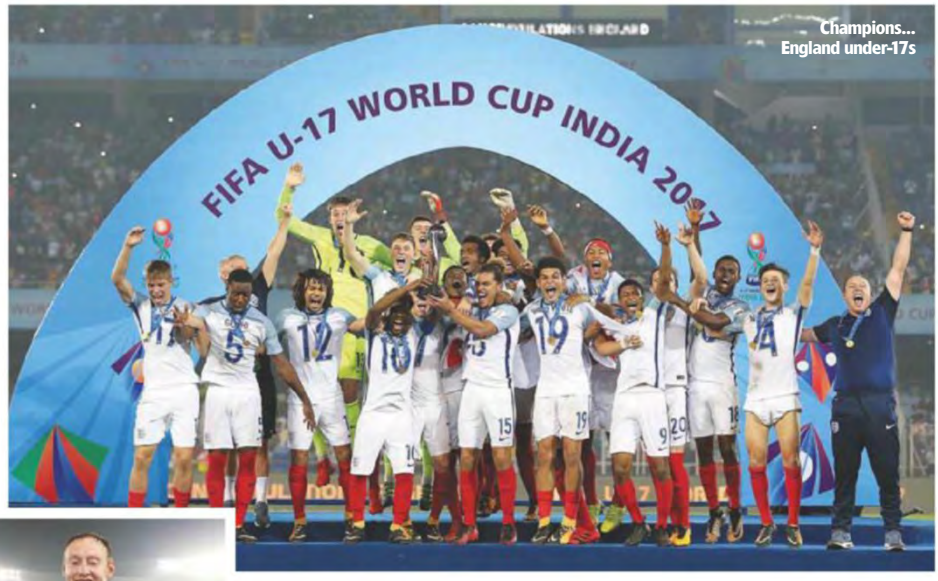
"I have a feeling now that India is a football country," said the FIFA president. But those words were ill-timed. Days later, when the euphoria of staging a historic World Cup was receding, the Delhi High Court annulled Patel's AIFF presidency over election irregularities and appointed administrator SY Quraishi to oversee fresh polls within five months. The ruling has plunged the Indian bid for the 2019 Under-20 World Cup and the domestic game, which has so much catching up to do, into a crisis.

The more things change in Indian football, the more they stay the same. WS

INDIA

England's golden year

FA strategy pays off with record-breaking silverware haul



Champions... England under-17s

Success at the Under-17 World Cup was the final glorious chapter in a year of triumph for English football, emulating Brazil's feat from 2003 of holding both the under-17 and under-20 world titles at the same time.

England also enjoyed success at the Euro Under-19 Championship, while the under-21s triumphed at the Toulon tournament and lost on penalties to eventual champions Germany in the semi-final of the European Under-21s. The under-17s also came close to winning the European title this summer but conceded an injury-time equaliser to Spain in the Final before losing a penalty shoot-out.

Triumphant... Steve Cooper

The haul of silverware was impressive enough, but the manner of England's victory in India was remarkable. After thrashing a much-fancied USA in the quarter-finals and sweeping past a resilient Brazil in the semis, they saved their best for the Final. Recovering from 2-0 down, they beat Spain 5-2 with a masterclass of confident, dashing football.

Phil Foden of Manchester City was voted the tournament's best player, while Liverpool forward Rhian Brewster was top scorer with nine goals. But there were confident performances throughout the team – a testament to the coaching of manager Steve Cooper and his team based at the national football centre, St George's Park.

Victory in the Final was achieved without arguably their most talented player, Jadon Sancho, as the former Manchester City starlet was recalled to Germany after the group stage at the request of his Bundesliga club, Borussia Dortmund.

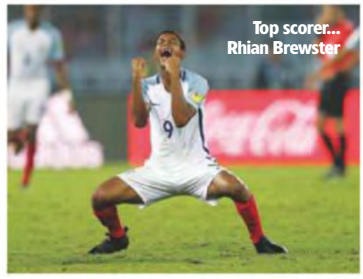
The winning side in India was dominated by players from Manchester City and Chelsea, while only two – Fulham's Steven Sessegnon, twin brother of Ryan, and Morgan Gibbs-White of Wolves – are not with Premier League clubs.

While few have yet to experience first-team action with their clubs, an exception is midfielder Tashan Oakley-Boothe, who has played in the League Cup for Spurs.

None of those on Chelsea's books – including attacking midfielder Callum Hudson-Odoi and George McEachran, younger brother of Brentford midfielder Josh – have made the step up to the senior side.

> "We are asking players to take the lead, trying to help them fit into the England DNA. At the end we want players to become senior players"
> England under-17s manager, Steve Cooper

But Cooper is confident that his players will be able to handle the switch after their experiences with England, stating: "I am encouraging the players to take ownership, we ask the players' opinion on things: gameplans, opposition analysis, game reviews. We'll sit down with the players and watch the match and they'll be telling us what they thought, and how they can get better, and then we'll facilitate that.


Top scorer... Rhian Brewster

"These are elite players and their understanding of what they need and what they want is quite high. As long as they understand the aims and objectives for each game, we are asking players to take the lead, trying to help them fit into the England DNA.

"At the end we want players to become senior players and to show leadership and responsibility."

Cooper is part of a team assembled at St George's Park by FA technical director Dan Ashworth. None are big-name former players, with coaching credentials more important than medals.

Keith Downing, the former West Bromwich Albion academy coach, is in charge of the under-19s, while former Derby County and Newcastle United assistant Paul Simpson coached the under-20s to their triumph in South Korea. Former Coventry City and Northampton Town manager Aidy Boothroyd is in charge of the under-21s.

"We have a plan," says Cooper. "We have been at St George's Park for five years and all the national coaches are very close, we work in a similar way. The teams are expected to play in a certain way and if it is a good one the more you practise it the better you become at it." WS

Comeback...Marc Guehi (centre) scores against Spain

THE VICTORIOUS ENGLAND SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Curtis ANDERSON (Manchester City) (6 apps), Josef BURSIK (Stoke City) (0), William CRELLIN (Fleetwood Town) (1)
Defenders: Timothy EYOMA (Tottenham) (3), Lewis GIBSON (Everton) (1), Marc GUEHI (Chelsea) (7) (1 goal), Joel LATIBEAUDIERE (Manchester City) (7), Jonathan PANZO (Chelsea) (6), Steven SESSEGNON (Fulham) (5)
Midfielders: Phil FODEN (Manchester City) (7) (3 goals), Conor GALLACHER (Chelsea) (4), Morgan GIBBS-WHITE (Wolves) (7) (2 goals), Angel GOMES (Manchester United) (5) (2 goals), Callum HUDSON-ODOI (Chelsea) (7) (1 goal), Nya KIRBY (Crystal Palace) (6), George McEACHRAN (Chelsea) (6), Tashan OAKLEY-BOOTHE (Tottenham) (6), Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund) (3) (3 goals), Emile SMITH-ROWE (Arsenal) (3) (1 goal)
Forwards: Daniel LOADER (Reading) (2) (2 goals), Rhian BREWSTER (Liverpool) (6) (8 goals)

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

UNDER-17 WORLD CUP STARS

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Timothy WEAH

Striker, age 17 (22.02.00), Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) & USA

In a sentence
It's all in the genes for the US hot-shot attacker who is the son of former FIFA Player of the Year and Ballon d'Or winner George Weah.

What they say
USA coach John Hackworth after a stunning goal against Paraguay: "By the way, the second goal he scored tonight wasn't only brilliant; it was world-class. I'm sure a lot of people are taking notice."

Francois Rodrigues, PSG youth coach: "He's one of our top talents, one of those youngsters who has all the necessary qualities. But we're still only talking about potential. Sometimes those top of the class players don't make it."

George Weah: "He's not good because he's my son, he's good because he loves the game. He's learning the game on his own. The credit belongs to him, not me."

> "He's not good because he's my son, he's good because he loves the game. He's learning the game on his own"
>
> George Weah

The story so far
After cutting his soccer teeth at West Pines United in South Florida and national-development academy Blau-Weiss Gottschee in NYC, he gained valuable experience with New York Red Bulls juniors and in 2014 joined the youth ranks at Paris Saint-Germain, where his father used to headline. He was recently handed his first professional contract after shining in the UEFA Youth League with PSG's under-19s. He has enjoyed considerable success with the USA under-17 squad this year, helping them to the CONCACAF championship runners-up spot and scoring a hat-trick in a 5-0 victory over Paraguay in the world finals in India.

The next step
He trained with the PSG senior squad during the recent international break and coach Unai Emery and has been impressed with the teenager's work with the under-19s and reserves.

Strengths
Mobile and aware, he can play anywhere along the front line, equally happy as a conventional winger or penalty-box predator. Possessing pace and an eye for a pass, he is also extremely unselfish.

Weaknesses
Aerially he is not compatible to his famous father and is by no means the finished product physically.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT WEAH

- He is only the fifth player to score a hat-trick at a senior or youth World Cup for the USA.
- Qualified to play for America, Liberia or France, he turned down an invitation to play for *Les Bleus*' junior side last year.
- While playing for New York Red Bulls' youth side, his team-mates included Kyle Gruno, a centre-back who is now with Leicester City.

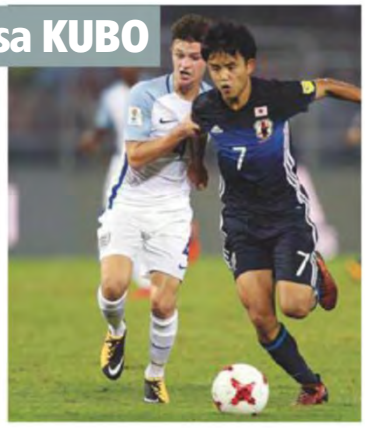
Yacine ADLI

Midfielder, age 17 (29.07.00), Paris Saint-Germain & France
From Algerian stock, he always has a trick up his sleeve and loves to take on opposing defenders. Equally comfortable in a deep-lying role, as a number 10 or out wide.

Jann-Fiete ARP

Striker, age 17 (06.01.00), Hamburg & Germany
Scored five of Germany's goals in the tournament, and twice in three games for HSV in the Bundesliga. With the club since he was 10, RB Leipzig are watching him.

Takefusa KUBO



Midfielder, age 16 (04.06.01), Tokyo & Japan
Spent almost three years at Barcelona's La Masia academy before heading home after Barca were hit with a transfer ban for youth recruitment misdemeanours.

Mohamed MOUKHLISS

Midfielder, age 17 (06.02.00), Real Madrid & Spain
Born in Madrid to Moroccan parents, he played for all but five minutes of Spain's seven-game run to the runners-up spot in India. Better known as "Moha".

Eric AYIAH

Striker, age 17 (06.03.00), Charity Stars & Ghana
An inspirational captain and an accomplished marksman, unusually for a striker, he insists on wearing the number six shirt, which is a reference to his date of birth and his country's Independence Day. He is expected to quit Accra club Charity Stars in the January transfer window, with Portugal or Italy his most likely destination.

Phil FODEN

Midfielder, age 17 (28.05.00), Manchester City & England
Won the player of the tournament award, particularly catching the eye with his ability to dictate the play and with his two goals in the come-from-behind 5-2 victory over Spain in the Final. A local lad who has been at City for over a decade, he was included in their squad for the pre-season tour of the United States and is in boss Pep Guardiola's thoughts. Neither strong nor tall, but remarkable in his control and his pass selection.

LINCOLN

Striker, age 16 (16.12.00), Flamengo & Brazil
The fact that Barcelona, Real Madrid, Juventus and Internazionale are vying for the signature of Brazil's front-line spearhead speaks volumes about the youngster's huge potential. An explosive mixture of razor-sharp reactions in the box, mobility and approach guile, he was first called into the Brazil under-15 set-up when he was just 13 and played for Flamengo under-20s at 16.

Lassana N'DIAYE

Striker, age 17 (03.10.00), Guidars & Mali
Once informed by Mali under-17 coach that he was too small, he has since developed into an exciting young talent, proving the point with six smartly taken goals in India. Was rewarded for his exploits with a call-up to the senior squad for a World Cup qualifier against Gabon. Expected to make the move to France soon.

Glenn Moore

Breaking point

There is growing discontent at the treatment of women by the game's male-dominated leadership

There were some notable absentees from FIFA's ludicrously overblown "The Best" awards night at the London Palladium, with Lieke Martens and Sarina Wiegman, winners of the women's player and coach gongs respectively, otherwise engaged in preparing for Holland's international against Norway the following night.

That the show clashed with qualifying ties for the FIFA Women's World Cup might be regarded as an unfortunate coincidence were it not for the absence of almost everyone else connected with the women's game as well.

There were a few females in the testosterone-soaked arena. Some, such as Arsenal's ex-England defender Alex Scott, were presenting an award; others, such as American Carli Lloyd, had been nominated. But most of the very few women present were there as an adjunct to their husband or boyfriend. Not one female coach was present. Chelsea's Emma Hayes, among the nominees and in her home town, was not invited, even though men's coach Antonio Conte and his wife were, along with ex-Chelsea players Mark Schwarzer and Ray Wilkins. Nor was there a female world XI to match the male one.

It was a night that suggested the various statements FIFA have made in support of the women's game in recent years were words without meaning.

This did not go unnoticed. Ex-England international Kelly Smith and Sweden's Kosovare Asllani were among those tweeting their dismay, while some of the few female figures within FIFA lobbied hard for change next year. However, most in the sport simmered in silence.

There was a time when the women's game would have been thrilled simply to have representation at such a gala. But 2017 was the year women's football stopped being grateful at just getting noticed and started demanding the recognition due for half the world's population.

From Australia to Norway, Scotland to Argentina, players threatened or took industrial action.

In Denmark, the Euro Championship runners-up actually went on strike, jeopardising their chances of reaching the 2019 World Cup finals. In Brazil, players quit the national team in response to the sacking of the first female national coach. In England, a bullying and discrimination claim led to the firing of a manager who had steered the team to successive tournament semi-finals, which imperilled the position of leading Football Association officials.

The most dramatic action was taken by the Danes, who refused to play a World Cup qualifier against Sweden. They had already forced the cancellation of a September friendly with Holland and only played a World Cup tie in Hungary a few days later after a temporary deal with the Danish federation. Despite the intervention of the men's national team, who offered to transfer £60,000-a-year from their agreement, negotiations broke down and the game was cancelled.

Sweden are also in dispute with their federation and Chelsea's Hedvig Lindahl was among the Swedish players to express their support for the Danish players, stating they were happy to re-arrange the tie rather than be awarded a win. Given the sole automatic qualifying place is likely to be between these two teams this was a notable gesture.

Stand...Chelsea's Eniola Aluko (left)

Strike...Denmark train ahead of the cancelled game against Sweden

The Danes beat Croatia in a qualifier a few days later after another temporary arrangement but negotiations, which centre on employment status as well as pay, remain ongoing.

Nearby, Norway showed a way forward. Relations between the players and their federation had deteriorated to such an extent that 2016 UEFA player of the year Ada Hegerberg announced she was so disenchanted she was taking a break from international football, at 22. This followed on from premature permanent retirements by several other players.

But with the help of the men's team and the players' union, a new agreement with the Norwegian FA was reached. The men volunteered to take a cut in their basic pay to create parity.

In New Zealand, where male and female teams already received the same pay and prize-money proportions, the FA said it was seeking a deal which would cover both male and female teams and encompass aspects such as travel conditions – at present only the men fly

Honour...Lieke Martens accepts the The Best FIFA Women's Player award by video link

business class long-haul.

New pay-and-conditions agreements were also struck in the USA, after long and occasionally bitter negotiations; Ireland, after the squad went public on treatment that included having to share team tracksuits with boy's youth teams, necessitating changing at airport toilets; and Scotland, after the squad imposed a pre-Euro 2017 media black-out.

In Argentina the team refused to train ahead of the 2018 Copa America in protest at being paid just $8.50 in expenses per training session. The players, who are amateurs, said attempts to discuss this and other dissatisfactions, such as training conditions and travel arrangements, had been ignored.

Copa America holders Brazil will be without five players, headed by Cristiane, who quit following the sacking of Emily Lima, the team's first female coach. Lima had mixed results, but had arranged friendlies against stronger opposition than usual to battle-harden the team for major tournaments. Runners-up in the 2007 World Cup and 2008 Olympics, Brazil have failed to reach a Final in either competition since.

Lima's departure was the catalyst for long-brewing discontent to boil over. An open letter signed by the quintet and other former internationals, including Formiga, said the players quit because they were "exhausted from years of disrespect and lack of support". Christiane, explaining her decision, said: "I dealt with it for 17 years, but I can't anymore." However, the team's most high-profile player, Marta, resisted calls to join the exodus.

Protest...a mascot wears a Republic of Ireland tracksuit top

There has been progress this year, with English minor-league side Lewes announcing they will pay their men's and women's teams equally. New leagues began in Mexico and India, while a landmark TV deal was struck for NWSL coverage in the US. Elsewhere, Bibiana Steinhaus became the first woman to referee in the Bundesliga, Juventus launched a women's team and FIFA agreed to regulate transfers in the women's game.

> There was a time when the women's game would have been thrilled simply to have representation at such a gala. But 2017 was the year women's football stopped being grateful at just getting noticed and started demanding the recognition due for half the world's population

Catalyst... Brazil's Cristiane

However, WSL club Notts County Ladies went bust, and Watford and Sunderland downgraded players' employment status. In the NWSL, 20-something female players continue to quit due to low pay, and of the 211 FIFA nations only 118 have played a women's international in the last 18 months. The loss of Australia's Moya Dodd from FIFA's executive committee was also a blow.

Break...Ada Hegerberg of Norway

In England the determination to take a stand was reflected via an individual struggle, with allegations of racism and bullying made by Eniola Aluko against England coach Mark Sampson having significant repercussions.

After two flawed enquiries, Aluko – whose international career has stalled at 102 caps – accepted the findings of the re-opened external investigation, which found Sampson had made racist comments but cleared him of being a racist and of systematic bullying. It was recommended that he should undergo diversity training but not be fired.

However, the Welshman had already been sacked after the FA looked anew at historic allegations of inappropriate behaviour with players prior to his time with England. But this did not prevent FA executives, including chairman Greg Clarke and chief executive Martin Glenn, from being grilled by a hostile Parliamentary committee.

Briefly it seemed heads would roll, especially that of the FA's technical director Dan Ashworth. However, the success of England's male under-17 side completed a golden year for the development teams he oversees and that has strengthened his position.

Caretaker coach Mo Marley says Aluko would be welcomed back into the team, but loyalties have been divided with many in the squad supportive of Sampson.

Aluko's has often been a lonely fight, but no one in the FA will take women's football lightly again.

That message seems not to have filtered up to FIFA yet, or to the majority of FAs around the world, but 2017 suggested the old men who run the game will hear much more from the young women who want to play it. WS

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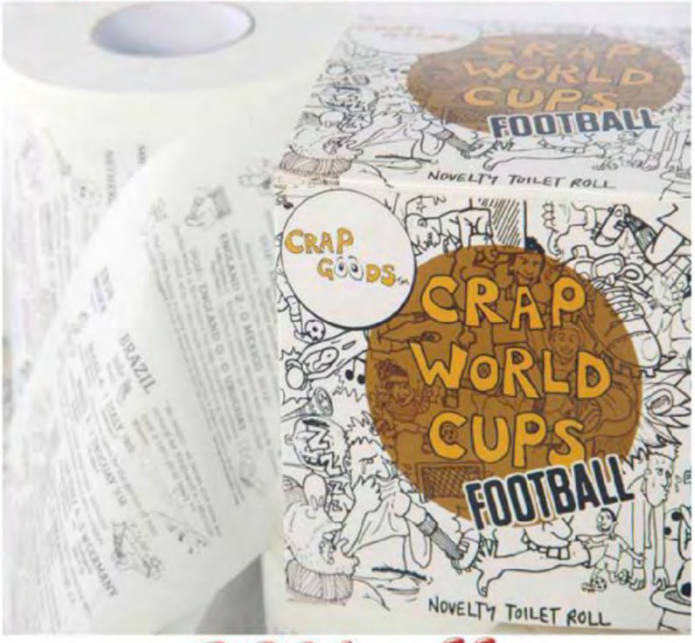

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October 25-November 22, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Wednesday October 25

ENGLAND: Leicester City make Claude Puel their third manager of the season. He replaces Michael Appleton, who stepped in when Craig Shakespeare was sacked.
GERMANY: Naby Keita is sent off for the third time in seven games for club and country as RB Leipzig lose to Bayern Munich on penalties in the German Cup.
GUATEMALA: The former general secretary of Guatemala's football federation, Hector Trujillo, receives an eight-month jail sentence and is the first person to be sent to prison in the FIFA corruption scandal.
USA: Vancouver Whitecaps beat San Jose Earthquakes 5-0 and record the biggest MLS play-off victory for 17 years.

Thursday October 26

SCOTLAND: Rangers sack manager Pedro Caixinha, whose reign of 229 days is the shortest in the club's history.

Friday October 27

AUSTRALIA: The Association of Australian Football Clubs says that it hopes a national second division will be in place by 2019.

Saturday October 28

EGYPT: Despite taking a third-minute lead through Moamen Zakaria, Al Ahly are held to a 1-1 draw at home by Morocco's Wydad in the first leg of the CAF Champions League Final.
ENGLAND: Trailing 2-0 to Spain in the Final, England come back to win 5-2 in the Under-17 World Cup.
MOZAMBIQUE: Costa do Sol gain revenge for being pipped to the title a few weeks earlier by beating league champions Songo 1-0 in extra time to win the Mozambican Cup for the first time in 10 years.

Sunday October 29

RUSSIA: Lokomotiv Moscow win 3-0 away at second-place Zenit to lead the table at the halfway point.
SOUTH KOREA: Jeonbuk Motors claim their fifth K.League Classic title, with two games to spare, by beating Jeju United 3-0.
SPAIN: Real Madrid lose 2-1 at Girona as their record-breaking run of 13 consecutive La Liga away wins comes to an end.

Monday October 30

GERMANY: Werder Bremen sack coach Alexander Nouri and place under-23 boss Florian Kohfeldt in temporary charge in the wake of Sunday's 3-0 defeat by Augsburg.
SERBIA: Slavoljub Muslin, who led Serbia to next summer's World Cup, has his contract terminated, with assistant Mladen Krstajic taking temporary control.

Tuesday October 31

ARGENTINA: Trailing 1-0 to River Plate from the first leg, Lanus go 3-0 down on aggregate in their home game before coming back to win 4-3 and reach their first Libertadores Cup Final.
FRANCE: Layvin Kurzawa scores a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain qualify for the Champions League knockout stage with a 5-0 win at home to Anderlecht.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich book a place in the Champions League last 16 with a 2-1 victory at Celtic.

Finalists...Gremio (in blue) beat Ecuador's Barcelona

Wednesday November 1

BRAZIL: Despite losing 1-0 at home to Ecuador's Barcelona. Gremio's decade-long wait to reach a fifth Libertadores Final is over as they go through 3-1 on aggregate.
ENGLAND: Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City qualify for the knockout stage of the Champions League with wins over Real Madrid (3-1) and Napoli (4-2) respectively.

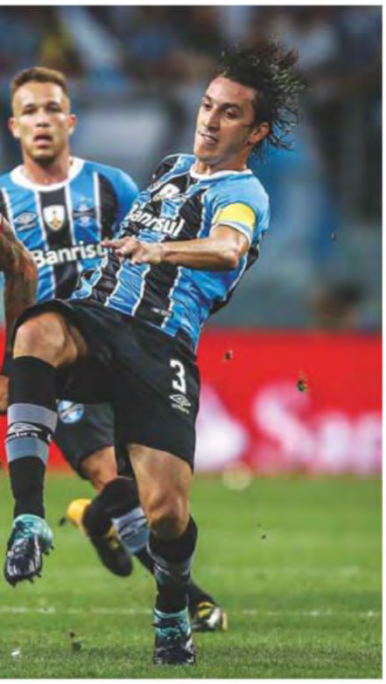
Thursday November 2

BELGIUM: Joel Lobanzo, a 17-year-old with Royal Antwerp, dies after suffering a sudden heart attack and collapsing while training with the under-19 side on Tuesday.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Arsenal, Dynamo Kiev, FCSB, Lazio and Zenit all make it through to the round of 32.
FRANCE: Patrice Evra, who was named as a substitute, is sent off after kicking one of his own team's fans in the head before Marseille's 1-0 loss at Vitoria Guimaraes in the Europa League.

Saturday November 4

GERMANY: Bayern Munich cruise to a 3-1 win over title rivals

On target..Vancouver Whitecaps midfielder Cristian Techera scores against San Jose Earthquakes



Borussia Dortmund and open a four-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga.
IRAQ: Air Force Club win the AFC Cup for a second time, beating Istiklol 1-0 in the Final at Hisor Central Stadium in Tajikistan.
MALAYSIA: League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim complete the double with a 2-0 win over Kedah in the Malaysia Cup Final.
MOROCCO: Wydad win the CAF Champions League, beating Egypt's Al Ahly 1-0 at home to triumph 2-1 on aggregate.
SCOTLAND: Celtic beat St Johnstone and set a British record of 63 domestic games unbeaten.
USA: The NASL says it will appeal after losing a court bid to retain its second-tier status.

Sunday November 5

ARGENTINA: Nahitan Nandez scores the decisive goal as Boca Juniors win 2-1 at River Plate in the 200th *Superclasico* and is ➤

Winner...Boca's Nahitan Nandez (left)

Swaziland

STEVE MENARY

Domestic boost can help new coach

National side struggling under Dutch boss De Jongh

Footballing success is in short supply in Swaziland, but a controversial league expansion could provide benefits. This season, Vovovo and Mbabane Highlanders were added to make the Swazi Premier League a 14-team competition.

A total of 4.1 million Swazi lilangeni (£220,000) has been put into the league for the 2017-18 season by MTN Swaziland and there is also money from Swazi public television – although they must compete with an influx of games from abroad, mostly from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While clubs are limited to five overseas players, expanding the league should give opportunities for domestic players, who are mainly part-time. Thami Dlamini, chief executive of Moneni Pirates, says: "We are semi-professionals except for a few teams. Swallows are one, that's why they are always on top."

Mbabane Swallows won last year's league without losing a game and were strengthened this summer by the return of Felix Badenhorst after a year in the Democratic Republic of Congo with AS Vita, which the national-team striker described as a "living hell" due to security issues.

Badenhorst was at AS Vita with fellow Swazi striker Mthunzi Mkhontfo, who remains in the DRC and missed new national coach Hendrik Pieter De Jongh's first game due to injury.

Under Dutch boss De Jongh, Swaziland began their Africa Nations Cup qualifiers in June with a goalless draw in Niger, but qualifying ahead of Egypt and Tunisia will be tough.

The COSAFA Cup should have offered a better chance of success, but they lost to Zimbabwe and Namibia, and crashed out of the African Nations Championship, 7-0 on aggregate to Zambia.

The team's FIFA ranking has slumped from an all-time high of 88 earlier this year to 140 in October, but former national coach Valere Billen believes there is a good opportunity for improvement.

Billen, who focused on youth when in charge, says: "After intensive scouting, I realised that there was quite a [lot of] young talent. This determination was confirmed in November 2012 when I won an international tournament with them in Angola. Some of these young people are in the selection of the current core."

The Belgian adds: "The extension of 12 to 14 teams is, in my opinion, a good thing when it comes to quality and not quantity. Swaziland has enough potential to grow into a big tournament. It will depend mainly on further professionalisation in various areas."

The expansion of the league and greater sponsorship will play a part, but De Jongh also needs to improve international results. WS

Clash... Swaziland's Simanga Shongwe (left) takes on Zimbabwe in this year's COSAFA Cup

PHOTO: COSAFA

➤ one of two players to be sent off.
FRANCE: Saint-Etienne's game with Lyon is halted for 20 minutes as their fans invade the pitch during a 5-0 home derby defeat. Mario Balotelli scores the only goal of the game as Nice beat Dijon but he is then sent off for the third time in his Ligue 1 career.
ITALY: Roma beat Fiorentina 4-2 and set a new Serie A record of 12 consecutive away wins. Genoa fire coach Ivan Juric the day after a 2-0 defeat by city rivals Sampdoria.
KAZAKHSTAN: Astana claim their fourth successive title with a 4-0 victory over Akzhayik.
SPAIN: Paco Alcacer scores both goals in a 2-1 victory over Sevilla as Lionel Messi makes his 600th appearance for Barcelona.

Monday November 6

ARGENTINA: Omar De Felippe quits as Velez Sarsfield coach after a fan spits at him during the 2-0 home defeat by Union Santa Fe.
ENGLAND: West Ham United sack manager Slaven Bilic with the team in the relegation zone after just two Premier League wins this season.
USA: New York City's 38-year-old former Italy midfielder Andrea Pirlo confirms he has made his last appearance as a player.

Tuesday November 7

ENGLAND: David Moyes is given a six-month deal to manage West Ham United.
GERMANY: The oldest living World Cup winner, Hans Schafer, passes away at the age of 90. Horst Eckel, his team-mate in Germany's 1954 success, succeeds him at 85.

Wednesday November 8

COLOMBIA: Atletico Junior beat Independiente Medellin 2-0 to win 3-1 on aggregate and claim the Colombian Cup for the second time in three years.
WALES: An invitation is accepted to compete in the China Cup in March 2018 along with Uruguay, Czech Republic and the hosts.

Thursday November 9

CROATIA: A 4-1 first-leg victory at home to Greece puts Croatia within touching distance of a place in next summer's World Cup finals.
SWITZERLAND: A controversial Ricardo Rodriguez penalty, awarded for a handball, gives Switzerland a 1-0 win in Northern Ireland in their World Cup play-off opener.

Friday November 10

ENGLAND: Jordan Pickford, ➤

CAF Champions League

MARK GLEESON

Continental champions... Wydad celebrate

Wydad are crowned African champions

Moroccan side beat record-winners Al Ahly of Egypt

Solid... Wydad crowd out Al Ahly's Sherif Ekramy

Exactly 25 years on from their first title, Wydad of Casablanca are continental champions once more after edging record-winners Al Ahly 2-1 over two legs in the African Champions League Final.

A workman-like team, Wydad were semi-finalists last year after initially looking the most impressive team in the group phase, only to then implode against Zamalek.

But this time around they were able to hold their nerve against the other Egyptian giants, finishing above Al Ahly in the group stage and then beating them in the deciding tie.

In between, they were fortunate to dispatch defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns on penalties in the quarter-finals but proved to be far too strong for USM Alger in the semis.

> **Wydad conceded just one goal in seven home games during the 2017 competition**

Coached by the unheralded Houcine Ammouta, Wydad held a strong advantage after the first leg of the Final, which was held in Alexandria rather than Cairo as Egypt's military rulers continue to restrict the size of football crowds for the fear that stadiums might once again become the forum for anti-government sentiment.

Having thrashed Etoile Sahel of Tunisia in their semi-final, Ahly went ahead early in the first leg of the Final and looked odds-on to extend their record number of winning titles to nine.

A cracking effort with his left foot, on the half volley from outside the penalty area, saw Moamen Zakaria give the Egyptian side the lead after just two minutes. And they might have gone 2-0 ahead moments later but Moroccan-born Walid Azaro missed a glorious opportunity against his compatriots.

But in the 16th minute, the Borg El Arab stadium – which was already half empty because of the restrictions – was silenced as a routine sweep down the right wing saw Achraf Bencharki meet a cross with a glancing header to equalise.

Nigerian midfielder Junior Ajayi looked lively in the second half for Ahly, and he could be the next sensation to come out of the club, but Wydad held firm.

Having conceded just one goal in seven home games during the 2017 competition, mainly down to a high-pressing game and the fitness that comes with it, stout defending played a major part in the Moroccan side's triumph in the return leg one week later at a heaving Stade Mohamed V in Casablanca.

The game was settled on 69 minutes when Walid El Karti got between two defenders. From virtually on the goal line, he headed home a cross from Bencharki to secure victory. WS

First leg...Wydad striker Guillaume Nicaise Daho (right) takes on Ahmed Fathy

➤ Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Tammy Abraham, and subs Joe Gomez and Jack Cork make their debuts as England draw 0-0 with Germany.
FRANCE: UEFA bans Patrice Evra until June 30 for assaulting a supporter before a Europa League game in Portugal in October. His contract is subsequently terminated by his club side, Marseille.
SENEGAL: A 2-0 victory over South Africa sees Senegal reach their first global finals since 2002.
SOUTH KOREA: Son Heung-min scores both goals in a 2-1 friendly at home to Colombia to give Shin Tae-yong his first victory as South Korea coach.
SWEDEN: Jakob Johansson's first international goal gives Sweden a 1-0 lead after the first leg of their World Cup play-off against Italy.

Saturday November 11

DENMARK: Chances are few and far between in Copenhagen as Denmark and Republic of Ireland draw 0-0 in their play-off first leg.
MOROCCO: A 2-0 victory away to Ivory Coast sees Morocco finish top of their World Cup qualifying group.
TUNISIA: A point at home to Libya takes Tunisia back to the World Cup for the first time in 12 years.

Sunday November 12

CROATIA: A 0-0 draw in Greece sends Croatia to the World Cup with a 4-1 aggregate triumph.
INDONESIA: Despite losing 2-1 to Persija Jakarta on the last day of the season, Bhayangkara claim their first league title by virtue of winning more games than Bali United, with whom they finished level on points.
SWITZERLAND: A goalless draw with Northern Ireland, coming after their 1-0 win in the away leg, secures Switzerland's passage to a fourth consecutive finals.

Monday November 13

SWEDEN: A goalless draw in Italy takes Sweden through to the World Cup finals with a 1-0 aggregate win.

Tuesday November 14

ARGENTINA: Sergio Aguero is taken to hospital at half-time after putting Argentina 2-0 ahead against Nigeria, who come back to win 4-2.
BELGIUM: Romelu Lukaku becomes his country's record scorer as his 31st goal gives Belgium a 1-0 victory over Japan.
DENMARK: Christian Eriksen scores a hat-trick as Denmark come from behind to beat Republic of ➤

➤ Ireland 5-1 in Dublin and qualify for next summer's World Cup.
SERBIA: Branislav Ivanovic makes his 100th appearance for Serbia in a 1-1 draw away to South Korea.

Wednesday November 15

AUSTRALIA: A 3-1 victory over Honduras in Sydney, following a goalless first leg, secures Australia's place in Russia.
BELGIUM: Controversial owner Roland Duchatelet sells his shares in Belgian club Sint-Truiden to Japanese online company DMM.
BRAZIL: Corinthians clinch a seventh league title with a 3-1 victory over Fluminense.
FRANCE: Oscar Garcia resigns as Saint-Etienne coach five months after taking the job following the recent 5-0 loss to local rivals Lyon.
ITALY: Gian Piero Ventura departs as national coach following Italy's failure to reach Russia.
PERU: Goals from Jefferson Farfan and Christian Ramos give Peru a 2-0 victory over New Zealand to secure World Cup qualification for the first time in 36 years.
SPAIN: The Royal Spanish Football Federation confirms VAR technology will be implemented in La Liga for the start of next season.

Friday November 17

WALES: Chris Coleman, whose contract expires at the end of the month, steps down as Wales boss.

Saturday November 18

DR CONGO: Holders TP Mazembe beat Supersport United 2-1 in their home leg of the CAF Confederations Cup Final.
ENGLAND: Arsenal beat north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur 2-0 to clinch an 11th home league win in a row.
HOLLAND: Ajax win 8-0 away at NAC Breda but fall short of the Eredivisie record – SC Enschede's 10-1 win at Sittardia in 1960.
JAPAN: Urawa Red Diamonds draw 1-1 at Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia in the first leg of the AFC Champions League Final.
SCOTLAND: Hamilton Academical beat Rangers 2-0 to record their first league win at Ibrox since 1926.
SPAIN: Real Madrid are held to a 0-0 draw at city rivals Atletico.

Sunday November 19

ARGENTINA: Boca Juniors' 100 per cent start to the league season ends after nine straight wins with a 2-1 defeat at home to Racing.
BELGIUM: Club Brugge win 3-0 at home to Waasland-Beveren to ➤

Italy

PADDY AGNEW

Italy miss out

Ventura gets blame for *Azzurri* failure

Just one picture and just one word dominated the front page of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* on the morning of Tuesday, November 14. The word "*Fine*" (the end) accompanies only a shot of skipper Gigi Buffon in a moment of total despair seconds after Italy's elimination from next summer's World Cup finals, following a 0-0 play-off draw with Sweden at the San Siro the previous evening.

Monday, November 13 will go down in the annals of Italian football as an infamous date, a night of unthinkable failure, the night when Italian football first teetered on the edge of the abyss and then fell in, head first.

Gazzetta's front-page leader conveyed something of the sense of national disaster: "Italy at Year Zero. Buffon's tears and the stunned silence of the San Siro weigh like a tombstone on which is inscribed a final verdict, without appeal: Russia Farewell.

"It is easy, too easy to find fault with the coach [Ventura]. However, the sins of our ship's captain, more a guest than a boss of his own ship, do not absolve either the crew nor the shipowner.

"Everybody is to blame: Ventura, the players, the Football Federation, the entire organisation of our football, politics. Even the media are possibly guilty of collusion given that they did not point out stridently

All over...Gian Piero Ventura

Read all about it...the Italian press savaged the national side and their coach after the play-off defeat

enough that there was an iceberg on the horizon."

La Gazzetta dello Sport is right to suggest that no one person is to blame. However, one suspects that football historians will nonetheless point the finger at one man more than any other, namely coach Gian Piero Ventura.

Any analysis of Ventura's 17 months in charge must start with one obvious question. Namely, was it not a foolhardy gamble to appoint a 68-year-old coach who, despite his immense experience, had no international experience, having never coached one of Italy's top-level, Champions League clubs?

Seen by many as a "sensible" footballing man, Ventura's greatest skill, arguably, was to nurture young talent. Good players such as Leonardo Bonucci (while at Bari) and Alessio Cerci, Andrea Belotti and Ciro Immobile (while at Torino) all emerged under his leadership. However, there was always a suspicion that federation president Carlo Tavecchio had opted for him because he cost only a quarter as much as his predecessor, Antonio Conte, who earned €4.5million a year as opposed to Ventura's €1.2m.

While developing talent is one thing, coaching the national team is quite another. And by the end, Ventura had clearly lost the confidence of the senior members of the Italian squad – seen on live TV by millions during the second leg at the San Siro.

With the score 0-0 and a desperate siege of the Swedish defence in full cry, defensive midfielder Daniele De Rossi was asked to warm-up with a view to being brought on as a sub. De Rossi exploded into an untypical rage, screaming for all the world to lip read: "What the hell do you want to bring me on for? We've got to win this match, not draw it."

He then pointed to a player sitting two places away from him on the bench, namely Lorenzo Insigne, indicating that the striker should be brought on

Tears... Gigi Buffon

> "Buffon's tears and the stunned silence of the San Siro weigh like a tombstone on which is inscribed a final verdict, without appeal: Russia Farewell"
>
> *La Gazzetta dello Sport*

instead. And for all Ventura's alleged mistakes, none aroused more nationwide dismay than his failure to select Insigne for either of the play-off ties.

Insigne is arguably one of the few world-class attacking talents in Italian football and his form this season has been stupendous. A week after the disaster of the San Siro, he inspired his club side, Napoli, to a 3-0 Champions League win over Shakhtar Donetsk with a stunning opening goal.

On the Saturday before the return leg with Sweden, and in the wake of a particularly cautious attitude in the 1-0 defeat in the first leg, senior players had called on Ventura to use a 3-4-3 "go for broke" line-up, featuring Insigne, who had only been used for the final quarter-hour in Stockholm. By way of response, Ventura reportedly told the players: "OK, you pick the team and I'll hand in my resignation."

Both Ventura and Tavecchio have now both resigned, leaving Italian football in a temporary limbo. And with no urgent international appointments pending, the future is far from clear.

In the meantime, Carlo Ancelotti is just about everybody's choice to be the next coach even if, in the short term, the federation may turn to current under-21 boss Gigi Di Biagio on a caretaker basis. WS

➤ go six points clear at the top of the table at the regular season's half-way stage.

ITALY: Benevento lose 2-1 at home to Sassuolo and break Manchester United's record for the worst start to a season in the top five European leagues with a 13th straight defeat.

TURKEY: Roberto Soldado appears as a 61st-minute substitute and scores a hat-trick as Fenerbahce beat Sivasspor 4-1.

Monday November 20

ENGLAND: Assistant manager Gary Megson takes charge "until further notice" after West Bromwich Albion sack Tony Pulis.

ITALY: Carlo Tavecchio resigns as president of the Italian Football Federation following Italy's failure to qualify for the World Cup.

Tuesday November 21

AUSTRALIA: Sydney beat Adelaide United 2-1 in the FFA Cup Final and claim a third domestic trophy of the season in a game that ends with a mass brawl that is sparked by Adelaide's Michael Marrone pushing a ball boy.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Real Madrid and Besiktas seal places in the round of 16 with a 6-0 victory away at APOEL and a 1-1 draw at home to Porto respectively.

Wednesday November 22

AUSTRALIA: Six days after leading Australia to the World Cup finals, Ange Postecoglou steps down as coach and says the job had "taken a toll personally and professionally".

BRAZIL: Cicero gives Gremio a 1-0 lead against Lanus of Argentina after their home leg of the Libertadores Cup Final.

ENGLAND: Zlatan Ibrahimovic is the first player to appear for seven different clubs in the Champions League, adding Manchester United to Ajax, Juventus, Internazionale, Barcelona, Milan and Paris Saint-Germain in a 1-0 loss to Basle.

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain beat Celtic 7-1 to set a new record of 24 goals in a Champions League group – with one game still to play.

NEW ZEALAND: Anthony Hudson steps down as national coach.

SAUDI ARABIA: National coach Edgardo Bauza is sacked despite qualifying the team for next year's World Cup in Russia.

SPAIN: Sevilla announce that coach Eduardo Berizzo has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. Barcelona draw 0-0 with Juventus and qualify for the knockout stage of the Champions League. WS

SUMMER LEAGUE ROUND-UPS

	HOW THE LEAGUE WAS WON	CUP WINNERS	WHO QUALIFIED FOR EUROPE
Belarus PREMIER LEAGUE *by Oleg Zadernovsky*	The title will be decided on the last day of the season, with BATE, Dinamo Minsk and Shakhtyor Soligorsk all in with a chance of being crowned champions.	Dynamo Brest beat Shakhtyor Soligorsk in the Final of the 2016-17 competition, winning a dramatic penalty shoot-out 10-9 following a 1-1 draw.	The eventual league winners will enter the Champions League, with the runners-up and third-place side going into the Europa League, along with the winners of the 2017-18 Belarusian Cup, which concludes in May.
Estonia MEISTRILIIGA *by Andres Must*	Flora were champions for an 11th time, while Levadia and Nomme Kalju finished second and third respectively – as they had done the previous season. Defending champions FCI Tallinn were fourth.	FCI beat Tammeka Tartu 2-0 in the Final but then ceased to exist five months later, merging with Levadia to become FCI Levadia.	Flora go into the Champions League first qualifying round, while Levadia (right, in white) and Kalju enter the Europa League preliminaries.
Faroe Islands PREMIER LEAGUE *by Nick Bidwell*	Champions for the first time in their history the year before, Vikingur successfully defended their title. Despite losing their last two games of the season, they held on to finish ahead of KI on goal difference – who let themselves down during the campaign with too many draws. B36 and KSI were third and fourth respectively.	NSI Runavik won the Faroe Islands Cup for a third time, beating B36 1-0 in the Final. Left-back Einar Trondargjogv was the unlikely match winner, latching onto a misguided header from a team-mate and thumping the ball through the legs of the hapless opposition keeper.	Vikingur will begin their continental adventure in the opening round of the Champions League qualifiers. KI, B36 and KSI will take part in the preliminary rounds of the Europa League.
Finland VEIKKAUSLIIGA *by John Holmesdale*	HJK were runaway champions, winning the title by 20 points from nearest rivals KuPS. The capital club, from Helsinki, have now won seven of the last nine titles, but this is the first since 2014.	HJK completed the double by beating SJK with a goal from Akseli Pelvas in a narrow 1-0 win. Play was suspended when flares were let off by HJK fans.	HJK go into the Champions League first qualifying round, with KuPS, Ilves and Lahti in the Europa League first qualifying round.
Georgia EROVNULI LIGA *by Oleg Zadernovsky*	The championship race went down to the wire, with leaders Dinamo Tbilisi at home to second-place Torpedo Kutaisi on the final day of the season.	Chikhura Sachkhere will meet Torpedo Kutaisi in the Final on December 12.	Either Dinamo Tbilisi or Torpedo Kutaisi will enter the Champions League first qualifying round, with Samtredia joining the league runners-up in the Europa League first qualifying round, along with the cup winners.
Iceland URVALSDEILD *by John Holmesdale*	Valur, from the capital Reykjavik, won the title for the first time in 10 years, ahead of Stjarnan, who were runners-up for the second year in a row, and FH, who were champions for the previous two seasons. Valur led from the front with a tight defence, conceding just 20 goals over the course of the campaign.	IBV beat FH 1-0 in the Cup Final to claim their first silverware in almost 20 years.	Valur go into the Champions League, while Stjarnan (right, in blue) and FH will compete in the Europa League first qualifying round, along with Cup winners IBV.

RELEGATED/PROMOTED	PLAYER OF THE SEASON	COACH OF THE SEASON	NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Naftan Novopolotsk finished bottom of the table and will be relegated along with one other club. Luch Minsk and Smolevichi-STI were promoted from the First Division.	BATE's 28-year-old striker Mikhail Gordeichuk (right) impressed both domestically for his club and on the international stage with Belarus.	Dinamo Minsk's Sergei Gurenko (right) introduced a defensive solidity that saw his side competing for the league title.	A Croat midfielder who arrived from Belgian club Mechelen, Ljuban Crepulja played a big part in Shakhtyor's successful season.
Maardu and Kalev Tallinn were promoted and replace the now defunct FCI and Kalev Sillamae, who dropped down to the fourth division due to financial difficulties.	With 27 goals and 16 assists, 21-year-old Rauno Sappinen is one of a number of Flora players who look set to move abroad.	Arno Pijpers returned to Flora this season and the Dutchman won his fourth league championship as coach of the club.	Signed from Danish side Midtjylland, 19-year-old Nigerian midfielder Samson Onomigho struggled to settle in at first but had a hugely successful second half of the season.
With just three wins all season, rock bottom IF were relegated and will be replaced by second-tier champs AB, who return 12 months after demotion. Second bottom 07 Vestur, who came up last term, were reprieved as Vikingur II finished runners-up behind AB and reserve teams are not allowed in the top flight.	Veteran Nigerian striker Adeshina Lawal's sharpness in the box was the key factor in Vikingur's triumph. A graduate of the youth system at Danish club Midtjylland, the 33-year-old has been a hired gun in Scandinavia for the best part of a decade-and-a-half.	While KI were a little too cautious at times, Mikkjal Thomasson had his side extremely well drilled.	Although not an automatic starter for B36, 17-year-old defensive midfielder Magnus Jacobsen is undoubtedly one for the future. Hard-working and tactically-aware, he already has caps for the country's under-19 side.
JJL Jyvaskyla dropped into the second tier and were replaced by TPS, the Ykkonen champions. Honka, the Ykkonen runners-up who were demoted from the first to the third tier in 2014 for financial irregularities, won a fiery relegation play-off against HIFK to secure a second successive promotion.	Cameroon striker Ariel "Tuco" Neguekam enjoyed his best season in Finland, scoring 15 goals for Ilves and earning a move to HJK.	After success in the Europa League group stage, former HJK midfielder Mika Lehkusuo (right) steered the club back to the top of the table.	VPS midfielder Pyry Soiri (below right) scored on his international debut, against Croatia, then scored and provided an assist in a 2-0 win over Estonia.
The relegation places are still to be decided. The bottom side will go down automatically, while second and third from bottom enter the play-offs.	Despite his side's mid-table finish, Irakli Sikharulidze of Locomotive Tbilisi was the league's top scorer.	Back for a third spell at Dinamo Tibilisi, Kakhaber Kacharava allowed his creative players the freedom to play some fine attacking football throughout the campaign.	A 20-year-old midfielder, Giorgi Kutsia impressed with his versatility during his first full season for Dinamo Tbilisi.
Viking Olafsvik, who spent two seasons in the top flight, went down along with IA, the 2001 league champions. Fylkir, after a season away, and Keflavik, relegated in 2015, replace them.	With 19 goals in 22 games for Grindavik, 27-year-old striker Andri Runar Bjarnason earned himself a move to Helsingborg of Sweden.	Former national coach Olafur Johannesson (left), now 60, guided Valur to the league championship.	Stjarnan's 18-year-old central midfielder Alex Hauksson (right) had an encouraging first full season.

SUMMER LEAGUE ROUND-UPS

	HOW THE LEAGUE WAS WON	CUP WINNERS	WHO QUALIFIED FOR EUROPE
Kazakhstan PREMIER LEAGUE *by Nick Bidwell*	As was widely expected, Astana (right) claimed a fourth straight league title, but they were pushed all the way by Kairat.	Knockout-competition specialists Kairat lifted the trophy for the eighth time since independence in 1992, beating Atyrau 1-0 in the Final. Ivorian striker Gerard Gohou scored the winning goal but was later sent off.	Keen to have another taste of the Champions League group phase – which they last experienced in 2015 – Astana have a ticket for the initial pre-qualifying stage. Kairat, Ordabasy and Irtysh will take to the field in the first qualifying round of the Europa League.
Latvia VIRSLIGA *by Nick Bidwell*	Spartaks Jurmala cruised to a second consecutive league title, finishing nine points ahead of joint runners-up Liepaja and RIga. It was a solid achievement after opting for a change of coach mid-term, with Jozef Vukusic taking over the baton from Marek Zub.	Ventspils (below, in yellow) beat Riga on penalties in the 2016-17 Final, while in the new 2017 version Riga lost 2-0 to Liepaja.	Spartaks will be in the draw for the first qualifying round of next season's Champions League. Liepaja, Riga and Ventspils enter the Europa League at the first elimination phase.
Lithuania A LYGA *by Nick Bidwell*	The 2017 title race effectively was a three-horse race featuring Zalgiris, Trakai and Suduva, with the latter eventually winning their first-ever league championship. The turning point of the campaign was Suduva's 3-0 home win over Zalgiris in late October.	Cup winners in each of the previous six years, Zalgiris suddenly turned fallible in 2017, losing 1-0 in the Final to Stumbras, who had been struggling in the league. French striker Nasro Bouchareb poked home the winner six minutes from time.	Suduva can look forward to a berth in the first set of Champions League qualifiers. Zalgiris and cup winners Stumbras head for the first qualifying round of the Europa League, while Trakai will start in the preliminary round of the same competition.
Moldova NATIONAL DIVISION *by Miron Goihman*	With the season changing from autumn-spring to spring-autumn, an 18-game league championship was won by Sheriff (right).	The Cup Final is not due to be played until May 2018.	Sheriff will play in the Champions League, while league runners-up Milsami are in the Europa league along with one of Dacia Chisinau, Zaria Balti or Petrocub Hincesti, and next year's cup winners.
Norway ELITESERIEN *by Sigurd Odegaard*	A third title in a row was rarely in doubt as Rosenborg (right) topped the table from early April onwards, with Danish striker Nicklas Bendtner on fire.	The Cup Final, between Lillestrom and Sarpsborg, will be played at Ullevaal stadium in Oslo on December 3.	Rosenborg will compete in the Champions League qualifiers, while the three Europa League places will go to the Cup winners and the teams finishing second and third in the league.
Rep of Ireland PREMIER DIVISION *by Sean Creedon*	Runners-up to Dundalk for the last three seasons, Cork City (below) won the League of Ireland championship for the first time since 2005.	Kieran Sadlier scored the winner as Cork beat Dundalk on penalties to retain the FAI Cup and complete a first double. The two sides have contested the past three Finals and drew 1-1 in extra-time, with Niclas Vemmelund scoring for Dundalk and Achille Campion equalising.	While Cork go into the Champions League qualifying rounds, Dundalk, Shamrock Rovers and Derry City (below, in green and red respectively) enter the Europa League.
Sweden ALLSVENSKAN *by Nick Bidwell*	Allsvenskan champions for the fifth time in the last seven years, Malmo (left) were in pole position from gun to tape, losing only four matches all season.	Shrewdly led by their English coach Graham Potter (left), Ostersund claimed their first-ever piece of mainstream silverware, beating Norrkoping 4-1 in the Final.	Malmo will start in the second qualifying round of the Champions League. Allsvenskan runners-up AIK and third-place Djurgarden have tickets for the opening stage of the Europa League sifting process.

RELEGATED/PROMOTED	PLAYER OF THE SEASON	COACH OF THE SEASON	NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Under-achieving Taraz and Okzhetpes Kokshetau were demoted from the top flight, with their places going to Zhetysu Taldykorgan and Kyzyl-Zhar Petropavl.	Top scorer at this year's African Nations Cup, DR Congo striker Junior Kabananga (right, in yellow) was in good form for Astana.	Astana's Bulgarian coach Stanimir Stoilov (right) is a fine strategist and made sure his side retained their hunger on the domestic front.	One of the rare satisfactions for relegated Taraz was the eye-catching form of their diminutive right-winger Baktiyar Zaynutdinov. The 19-year-old is a box of tricks who also knows where the goal is.
Babite were kicked out of the championship in June for match-fixing and will be replaced by Valmiera, who took the second division by storm and were unbeaten all season.	Once on the books of top Russian side Zenit, Spartaks' 22-year-old winger Yevgeni Kozlov constantly impressed as both creator and finisher.	In his first season at the Liepaja helm, their ebullient, straight-talking Georgian boss Tamaz Pertia proved himself to be an excellent motivator and certainly got the best out of his squad, especially star attacker Arturs Karasausks.	Ventspils have a wonderful prospect in their teenage Nigerian striker Adeleke Akinyemi, who is powerful, intelligent and can finish with either foot.
More famous for its basketball section, Kauno Zalgiris were bottom for almost the entire season and will be replaced by Palanga. Stumbras beat second-tier runners-up Banga in a play-off to stay at the top table.	The top scorer in the league with 16 goals, the much-travelled 33-year-old Darvydas Sernas – who has played in Russia, Poland, Turkey, Australia and Scotland – was more often than not irresistible for Zalgiris.	Suduva's Kazakh coach Vladimir Cheburin says he always hopes to surprise his opponents and the 52-year-old demonstrated he has the tactical acumen to do just that.	Trakai 17-year-old midfielder Justinas Marazas was composed on the ball, diligent and enterprising.
Victoria Bardar won the A Division and will play in the top flight next term for the first time in their history. They will replace either Dinamo-Auto or Spicul Chiscareni.	One-time Anderlecht winger Ziguy Badibanga (in yellow) impressed and the 25-year-old is likely to move on before next season begins.	Italian coach Roberto Bordin (right) led Sheriff to the title and the group stage of the Europa League.	Signed by Sheriff from Zimbru, 18-year-old striker Vitalie Damascan has lots of potential.
Bodo/Glimt and Start are promoted and will replace Viking and whoever finishes second from bottom in the top flight. The third bottom team will face a relegation/promotion play-off.	Ohi Omoijuanfo is a 23-year old Norwegian striker who was a prolific goalscorer for Stabaek.	Kare Ingebrigtsen (right) has won the league title three seasons in succession since joining Rosenborg in 2014.	Samuel Adegbenro (right) was signed from Viking and scored three goals as Rosenborg beat Ajax in the Europa League.
Drogheda United (below), Finn Harps and Galway United went down. Waterford were promoted as the top flight becomes a 10-team competition next year.	Even though he left Cork for Preston North End in July, Sean Maguire was the league's top scorer with 20 goals and went on to make his international debut for the Republic in a World Cup qualifier against Moldova in October.	Cork's record appearance holder, John Caulfield (right) was appointed manager in 2013 and led the side to a league-and cup double exactly three years later.	Bohemians' Nigerian-born 20-year-old midfielder Fuad Sule (below) almost joined Barnet in August but a deal could not be done in time for the English transfer deadline.
Eskilstuna and Halmstad – the first Swedish league winners of the new millennium – will be replaced by Brommapojkarna and Dalkurd – a club founded by Kurdish immigrants. Trelleborgs were also promoted, after beating top-tier Jonkoping in a play-off.	Malmo's Danish midfielder Anders Christiansen (below) was dynamic, inventive and also weighed with a few goals, after which the club extended his current contract to 2022.	After taking Eskilstuna from the third tier to the top flight, Turkey-born Ozcan Melkemichel (left) oversaw a similar upwardly mobile tale at Djurgarden.	Eighteen-year-old IFK Gothenburg keeper Pontus Dahlberg (below) is tipped to move to one of the major European leagues in January.

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

OCTOBER 2017

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	8
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	7
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	5
EDERSON (Manchester City)	2
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	2
Alphonse AREOLA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	1

DEFENDERS

Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	8
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	7
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	7
John STONES (Manchester City)	7
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	6
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	5
Dani ALVES (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	5
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	5
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	4
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	4
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	3
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Marc BARTRA (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	2
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	1
Ben DAVIES (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
Sead KOLASINAC (Arsenal)	1
Jeremy MATHIEU (Sporting)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Salif SANE (Hanover)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	22
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	6
Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia)	5
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	4
ISCO (Real Madrid)	4
Nuri SAHIN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
Nemanja MATIC (Manchester United)	2
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	2
David SILVA (Manchester City)	2
DANILO (Porto)	1
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Marouane FELLAINI (Manchester United)	1
Alejandro GOMEZ (Atalanta)	1
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	1
Andres INIESTA (Barcelona)	1
JORGINHO (Napoli)	1
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	1
Ivan PERISIC (Internazionale)	1
Maximilian PHILIPP (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Adrien RABIOT (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	20
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	9
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	9
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	9
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	9
Romelu LUKAKU (Manchester United)	8
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	7
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	4
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	2
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Nabil FEKIR (Lyon)	2
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	2
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Cedric BAKUMBU (Villarreal)	1
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	1
Gabriel JESUS (Manchester City)	1
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	1
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	1

Internationals

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA section

● 5 finals places available

3rd round

Group A

Nov11 - Kinshasa
DR Congo 3 (Sidibe og 61, Bolingi pen 90+2, Kebano 90+3)
Guinea 1 (Karamokoba 71)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cam)
DR Congo: Matampi - Mpeko, Moke Abro, Tisserand, Ngonda, Mubele (Bokila 60), Mbemba, Maghoma (Mabidi 69), Kebano, Bolingi, Kabananga (N'Gbakoto 83).
Guinea: Traore - Sidibe, I Conde, Landel (Karamokoba 68), Ibrahima Conte/D, S Diallo, Issiaga Sylla, O Balde, Kante, Alkhali Bangoura (Lamah 79), Kamano.

Nov11 - Rades
Tunisia 0
Libya 0
Ref: Nampiandraza (Mad)
Tunisia: A Mathlouthi - Nagguez, S Ben Youssef, Meriah, Maaloul (Haddadi 70), Badri (Sassi 84), Ben Amor, Chaalali, Khazri (F Ben Youssef 70), Khenissi, Msakni.
Libya: Nashnoush - Al Maghasi, El Trbi, S Al Warfali, Sabbou, Tubal (Taqtaq 74), Almoatasembellah, Benali, Elhouni, Al Lafi (Ahmed 57), Ghanudi (Al Taher 90+2).

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD RND: GP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia (QF)	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
DR Congo	6	4	1	1	14	7	13
Libya	6	1	1	4	4	10	4
Guinea	6	1	0	5	6	14	3

Group B

Nov10 - Constantine
Algeria 1 (Brahimi pen 88)
Nigeria 1 (Ogu 63)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)
Algeria: Chaouchi - Mandi, Chafai, Cadamuro, Nessakh (Abdellaoui 30), Ferhat, Medjani, Bennacer (Bounedjah 76), Mahrez (Hanni 64), Slimani, Brahimi.
Nigeria: Ezenwa - Shehu, Troost-Ekong, Balogun, Aina, Ndidi, Ogu, Iheanacho, Etebo, Iwobi (Musa 81), Nwakaeme (Onyekuru 71).

Nov11 - Ndola
Zambia 2 (Daka 26, Mwila 64)
Cameroon 2 (Zambo Anguissa 31, Yaya 90+1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Jiyed (Mor)
Zambia: Mweene - A Chama, Z Tembo, S Sunzu, Kapumbu, A Mulenga, Mwepu (Banda 86), Malama, F Sakala (Mbewe 88), Daka, Mwila (Ngonga 77).
Cameroon: Ondoa - Leuko (Castelletto 46), Yaya, Ngadeu, Tolo, Siani, Boumal (Pangop 46), Ngamaleu, Zambo Anguissa, N'Jie (Olinga 67), Aboubakar.

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD RND: GP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria (QF)	6	4	2	0	12	4	14
Zambia	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Cameroon	6	1	4	1	7	9	7
Algeria	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Group C

Nov11 - Franceville
Gabon 0
Mali 0
Ref: Grisha (Egy)
Gabon: Ovono - Palun, Appindangoye, Ecuele Manga, Obiang, Biyogo Poko, Assoumou Akue (Obambou 74), Oto'o Zue (Biteghe 87), Madinda, Ameka Autchanga (Boupendza 54), Meye.
Mali: D Diarra - Sacko, Wague, Fofana, Y Kone, Samassekou, M Doumbia, Adama Traore/M, Bissouma (Haidara 71), Adama Traore/F (Djenepo 71), Niane (M Kone 84).

Nov11 - Abidjan
Ivory Coast 0
Morocco 2 (Dirar 25, Benatia 30)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Aurier, Gbamin, Kanon, Deli (Konan 46), Fofana (Cornet 62), Gradel, Kessie, Zaha, Doumbia, Gervinho (Kalou 76).
Morocco: El Kajoui - Dirar, Benatia, Saiss, Hakimi, Boussoufa, El Ahmadi, Belhanda (Fajr 90+1), Ziyech (S Amrabat 82), Boutaib (Bencharki 75), N Amrabat.

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD RND: GP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (QF)	6	3	3	0	11	0	12
Ivory Coast	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Gabon	6	1	3	2	2	7	6
Mali	6	0	4	2	1	9	4

Group D

Nov10 - Polokwane
South Africa 0
Senegal 2 (Sakho 12, Mkhize og 38)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)
South Africa: Khune - Mkhize, Gould, Daniels, Hlanti, Furman, Mokotjo, Zwane (Tshabalala 69), Manyama (Jali 63), S Vilakazi (Grobler 83), Tau.
Senegal: K N'Diaye - Gassama, Kouyate (A N'Diaye 86), K Koulibaly, Sabaly, S Sane, S Mane, C N'Doye, Gueye, Niang (Ciss 90+3), Sakho (Konate 78).
● *Restaging of tie originally played in Nov 2016 – FIFA deemed the result (a 2-1 win to South Africa) had been 'manipulated' by the referee*

Nov14 - Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso 4 (Nakoulma 45+1, 58, 62, Diawara 90+5)
Cape Verde Islands 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Essrayri (Tun)
Burkina Faso: Koffi - Malo, Dayo, Yago, Y Coulibaly, Toure, Alain Traore (Bance 53), C Kabore, B Traore (Diawara 88), Nakoulma, Bande (Sanogo 64).
Cape Verde Islands: Vozinha - Steven Pereira (Diney 67), Ponck, Fernando Varela, Stopira, Garry Rodrigues, Marco Soares, Danilson (Helder Tavares 59), Babanco (Rocha Santos 74), Ryan Mendes, Julio Tavares.

Nov14 - Dakar
Senegal 2 (Nguette 55, Mbodji 90+3)
South Africa 1 (Tau 65)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tessema Weyesa (Eth)
Senegal: Gomis - Wague, Mbodji, Kouyate, Sabaly, Nguette, Gueye, P A N'Diaye (C N'Doye 80), A N'Diaye (Diousse 88), Niang (Ciss 73), Sow.
South Africa: Khune - Mkhize, Gould, Daniels, Zungu, Furman, Hlanti, Zwane (Jali 71), Dolly, S Vilakazi (Manyama 84), Tau.

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD RND: GP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal (QF)	6	4	2	0	10	3	14
Burkina Faso	6	2	3	1	10	6	9
Cape Verde Is	6	2	0	4	4	12	6
South Africa	6	1	1	4	7	10	4

Group E

Nov12 - Brazzaville
Congo 1 (Baudry 10)
Uganda 1 (Karisa 11)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Mohamed (Sud)
Congo: Mouko - Etou-Thomaso, Mayembo, Baudry, Badila, Delarge (Kifoueti 62), D N'Dinga, Oniangue, Pambou (Bahamboula 71), Bifouma, Saint-Louis (Tsoumou 52).
Uganda: Onyango - Wadada, Juuko, Isinde, Walusimbi, Wasswa, Iguma, Karisa, Mutyaba (Kyambadde 56), Muleme (Masiko 86), Sserunkuma (Nsibambi 56).

Nov12 - Cape Coast
Ghana 1 (Gyasi 64)
Egypt 1 (Shikabala 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Diedhiou (Sen)
Ghana: R Ofori - Afful, Nuhu, Amartey, Agbenyenu, M Wakaso, E Ofori, Gyasi, Donsah (Waris 50), Ampomah (Twumasi 41), Dwamena (Boakye 74).
Egypt: Ekramy - Elmohamady, Gabr, Rabia (Samir 33), Hafez, Elneny, Morsy, Trezeguet, Shikabala (Said 65), Sobhi, Marei (Gamal 76).

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD RND: GP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt (QF)	6	4	1	1	8	4	13
Uganda	6	2	3	1	3	2	9
Ghana	6	1	4	1	7	5	7
Congo	6	0	2	4	5	12	2

● *The 5 group winners have qualified for the finals*

EUROPE section

● 13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts **Russia**, who qualify automatically)

The 9 group winners qualified directly for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best group-stage record entered the play-offs to play for places in the finals

Play-offs

1st legs

Nov 9 - Zagreb
Croatia 4 (Modric pen 13, N Kalinic 19, Perisic 33, Kramaric 49)
Greece 1 (Papastathopoulos 30)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 30,013. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Croatia: Subasic - Vrsaljko, Lovren, Vida, Strinic, Rakitic, Brozovic, Kramaric (Vlasic 82), Modric (Pasalic 89), Perisic, N Kalinic (Rebic 76).
Greece: Karnezis - Maniatis (Retsos 46), K Papadopoulos, Papastathopoulos, Tzavellas, Zeca, Samaris (Tachtsidis 62), Fortounis, Tziolis, Stafylidis (Bakasetas 71), Mitroglou.

Nov 9 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 0
Switzerland 1 (Rodriguez pen 58)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,269. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
Northern Ireland: McGovern - C McLaughlin, McAuley, J Evans, Brunt, Norwood, C Evans (Saville 65), Davis, Magennis, K Lafferty (Washington 78), Dallas (Ward 52).
Switzerland: Sommer - Lichtsteiner, Schar, Akanji, Rodriguez, Zakaria, Xhaka, Shaqiri, Dzemaili (Frei 83), Zuber (Mehmedi 87), Seferovic (Embolo 77).

Nov10 - Stockholm
Sweden 1 (J Johansson 61)
Italy 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 49,193. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Sweden: Olsen - Krafth (G Svensson 83), Lindelof, Granqvist, Augustinsson, Claesson, Sebastian Larsson, Ekdal (J Johansson 57), Forsberg, Toivonen, Berg (Kiese Thelin 74).
Italy: Buffon - Barzagli, Bonucci, Chiellini, Candreva, Parolo, De Rossi, Verratti (Insigne 76), Darmian, Belotti (Eder 65), Immobile.

Nov11 - Copenhagen
Denmark 0
Republic of Ireland 0
Att: 36,189. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Denmark: Schmeichel - P Ankersen, Kjaer, Bjelland, Larsen, Delaney, Kvist, Eriksen, Cornelius (Y Poulsen 64), N Jorgensen, Sisto (Bendtner 72).
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Christie, Duffy, Clark, Ward, Hendrick (Hourihane 90+3), Arter (Whelan 88), O'Dowda, Brady, McClean, Murphy (S Long 74).

2nd legs

Nov12 - Piraeus
Greece 0
Croatia 0
Att: 18,667. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Croatia 4-1 on agg
Greece: Karnezis - Torosidis, Papastathopoulos, Manolas, Retsos, Tziolis,Tachtsidis, Zeca, Bakasetas (Gianniotas 59), Christodoulopoulos (Fortounis 59), Mitroglou (Pelkas 78).
Croatia: Subasic - Vrsaljko, Lovren, Vida, Strinic, Rakitic, Modric (Mitrovic 90+1), Brozovic, Mandzukic, N Kalinic (Kramaric 78), Perisic (Rebic 86).

Nov12 - Basle
Switzerland 0
Northern Ireland 0
Att: 36,000. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Switzerland1-0 on agg
Switzerland: Sommer - Lichtsteiner, Schar, Akanji, Rodriguez, Shaqiri (Freuler 80), Zakaria, Xhaka, Zuber, Dzemaili (Mehmedi 61), Seferovic (Embolo 86).
Northern Ireland: McGovern - Hughes, J Evans, McAuley, Brunt, Ward (Jones 75), Davis, Norwood (Magennis 75), Saville, Dallas, Washington (McNair 82).

Nov13 - Milan
Italy 0
Sweden 0
Att: 72,696. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)
Sweden1-0 on agg
Italy: Buffon - Barzagli, Bonucci, Chiellini, Candreva (Bernardeschi 76), Florenzi, Jorginho, Parolo, Darmian (El Shaarawy 63), Gabbiadini (Belotti 63), Immobile.
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig, Lindelof, Granqvist, Augustinsson, Claesson (Rohden 72), J Johansson (G Svensson 19), Sebastian Larsson, Forsberg, Toivonen (Kiese Thelin 54), Berg.

Nov14 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Duffy 6)
Denmark 5 (A Christensen 29, Eriksen 32, 63, 74, Bendtner pen 90)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Denmark 5-1 on agg
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Christie, Duffy, Clark (S Long 71), Ward, Hendrick, Arter (McGeady 46), Meyler (Hoolahan 46), Brady, McClean, Murphy.
Denmark: Schmeichel - Kjaer, A Christensen, Bjelland, Delaney, Kvist, Y Poulsen (Cornelius 70), Eriksen, Larsen (P Ankersen 54), N Jorgensen (Bendtner 84), Sisto.

● *The 4 winners have qualified for the finals*

INTERCONTINENTAL PLAY-OFFS

Teams from 4 of the continental sections entered these play-offs:
Australia (as winners of the Asia section play-off for the 2 3rd-placed countries in the Asia 3rd round groups); Honduras (as the 4th-placed country in the CONCACAF 5th round group); New Zealand (as the Oceania section winners); Peru (as the 5th-placed country in the South America group)

1st legs

Nov10 - San Pedro Sula
Honduras 0
Australia 0
Att: 38,000. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Honduras: Escober - Beckeles, Johnny Palacios, H Figueroa, Izaguirre, Claros, A Mejia, Lanza (Chirinos 60), A Lopez (M Martinez 66), Quioto, Lozano (Costly 73).
Australia: Ryan - Wright, Sainsbury, Jurman, Risdon (Degenek 84), Jedinak, Luongo, Mooy, Behich, Irvine (Rogic 74), Juric (Rukavytsya 89).

Nov11 - Wellington
New Zealand 0
Peru 0
Att: 37,034. **Ref:** Geiger (USA)
New Zealand: Marinovic - Colvey, Boxall, Reid, Smith (Durante 68), Wynne, Lewis (Wood 74), McGlinchey, Thomas, Rojas (Tuiloma 78), Barbarouses.
Peru: Gallese - Corzo, Ramos, Rodriguez, Trauco, Tapia, Yotun (Aquino 86), Carrillo (Hurtado 78), Cueva (Polo 90+1), Flores, Farfan.

2nd legs

Nov15 - Sydney
Australia 3 (Jedinak 54, pen 72, pen 86)
Honduras 1 (Elis 90+4)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 77,060. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Australia 3-1 on agg
Australia: Ryan - Wright, Sainsbury, Jurman, Leckie, Milligan (Troisi 89), Jedinak, Mooy, Behich, Rogic (Kruse 77), Cahill (Juric 66).
Honduras: Escober - Beckeles, Johnny Palacios, M Figueroa, Alvarado, Izaguirre (H Figueroa 42; M Martinez 73), Elis, Claros, Acosta, Quioto (Hernandez 75), Lozano.

Nov15 - Lima
Peru 2 (Farfan 28, Ramos 65)
New Zealand 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 39,125. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Peru 2-0 on agg
Peru: Gallese - Advincula, Ramos, Rodriguez, Trauco, Tapia, Polo (Carrillo 74), Cueva (Zela 86), Flores, Farfan, Ruidiaz (Yotun 66).
New Zealand: Marinovic - Colvey, Durante (Brockie 77), Reid, Boxall, Wynne, Lewis (Rojas 59), McGlinchey, Tuiloma (Wood 46), Thomas, Barbarouses.

● *The 2 winners have qualified for the finals*

2018 World Cup finalists

Tunisia, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, Egypt (Africa);
Iran, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Australia (Asia);
Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama (CONCACAF);
Russia (hosts), France, Portugal, Germany, Serbia, Poland, England, Spain, Belgium, Iceland, Croatia, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland (Europe);
Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Colombia, Peru (South America)

2019 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

3rd round

● *Remaining games (to be played on Mar 27, 2018 unless otherwise stated) are listed under group tables*

Group A

Nov14 - Margao
India 2 (Chhetri pen 13, Lalpekhlua 69)
Myanmar 2 (Yan Naing Oo 1, Kyaw Ko Ko 19)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 5,546. **Ref:** Liu (HK)

Nov14 - Taipa
Macau 3 (Chan Pak Chun 72, Tarrao pen 80, Carlos Fernandes 87)
Kyrgyzstan 4 (Zemlianukhin pen 24, 52, Lux 36, Murzaev 84)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 353. **Ref:** Vo (Vie)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India (QF)	5	4	1	0	10	3	13
Kyrgyzstan	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Myanmar	4	1	2	1	8	5	5
Macau	5	0	0	5	4	15	0

Kyrgyzstan v Myanmar (date tbc); Kyrgyzstan v India; Myanmar v Macau

Group B

Nov10 - Buriram, Thailand
North Korea 4 (Pak Kwang-ryong pen 11, Kim Yu-song 42, Kim Yong-il 48, Jong Il-gwan 59)
Malaysia 1 (Safawi 67)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 287. **Ref:** Al Mirdasi (Sau)

Nov13 - Buriram, Thailand
Malaysia 1 (Safawi 85)
North Korea 4 (Kim Yu-song 15, 20, 45, Pak Kwang-ryong 79)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 504. **Ref:** Al Kaf (Oma)

Nov14 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 0
Lebanon 1 (Maatouk pen 41)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,109. **Ref:** K Al Marri (Qat)
Sent off: Tan Chun Lok (Hong Kong) 40

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lebanon (QF)	5	4	1	0	12	3	13
North Korea	5	2	2	1	11	10	8
Hong Kong	5	1	2	2	4	5	5
Malaysia	5	0	1	4	4	13	1

Lebanon v Malaysia; North Korea v Hong Kong

Group C

Nov14 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 0
Jordan 1 (Abu Amarah 17)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 18,369. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

Nov14 - Hanoi
Vietnam 0
Afghanistan 0
Att: 28,580. **Ref:** Abdulhusin (Bhn)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan (QF)	5	3	2	0	15	4	11
Vietnam (QF)	5	2	3	0	8	2	9
Cambodia	5	1	0	4	2	15	3
Afghanistan	5	0	3	2	5	9	3

Afghanistan v Cambodia; Jordan v Vietnam

Group D

Nov14 - Thimphu
Bhutan 2 (K S Tshering 59, C Gyeltshen 90+2)
Oman 4 (Al Hasani 48, Saleh 75, Al Hajri 85, Al Ruzaiqi 89)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,100. **Ref:** Noor (Mly)

Nov14 - Jenin
Palestine 8 (Yousef 6, 33, Faisal og 15, S Maraaba 30, 53, 54, 59, Cantillana 56)
Maldives 1 (Naiz 52)
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 5,750. **Ref:** Mashentsev (Kyr)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palestine (QF)	5	5	0	0	25	2	15
Oman (QF)	5	4	0	1	27	5	12
Maldives	5	1	0	4	4	19	3
Bhutan	5	0	0	5	2	32	0

Maldives v Bhutan; Oman v Palestine

Group E

Nov14 - Singapore
Singapore 0
Bahrain 3 (Abduljabbar 65, 84, Rashid 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,628. **Ref:** Gillett (Aus)

Nov14 - Balkanabat
Turkmenistan 2 (Yakshiyev 22, Annadurdyyev 40)
Taiwan 1 (Chen Po-liang pen 88)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 9,500. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain (QF)	5	3	1	1	11	3	10
Turk'stan (QF)	5	3	1	1	9	6	10
Taiwan	5	2	0	3	6	12	6
Singapore	5	0	2	3	3	8	2

Bahrain v Turkmenistan; Taiwan v Singapore

Group F

Nov14 - Lalitpur
Nepal 0
Philippines 0
Att: 1,023. **Ref:** Al Ali (Jor)

Nov14 - Hisor
Tajikistan 0
Yemen 0
Att: 12,000. **Ref:** Abou (Leb)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Philippines	5	2	3	0	11	7	9
Yemen	5	1	4	0	5	4	7
Tajikistan	5	2	1	2	9	7	7
Nepal	5	0	2	3	2	9	2

Philippines v Tajikistan; Yemen v Nepal

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 24-team finals; 12 other countries have already qualified - Australia, China, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Syria, Thailand, UAE (hosts) & Uzbekistan*

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, October 24

Oct 24 - St George's
Grenada 0
Panama 5 (Small 12, 32, Stephens 21, Dinolis 54, 68)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 2,550. **Ref:** Ward (SKN)
Panama: Rodriguez - Heraldez, Chen, J C Vargas (Ariano 46), Peralta (Ortega 57), Gonzalez (Asprilla 57), M Vargas, Nunez (Guerrero 57), Sanchez, Stephens (Fajardo 46), Small (Dinolis 46).

Saturday, October 28

Oct 28 - Hamilton
Bermuda 2 (Clemons 8, Bather 20)
Barbados 3 (Edmee 60, Howell 88, 90+2)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Villarreal (USA)

Tuesday, November 7

Nov 7 - Lisbon, Portugal
Latvia 0
Saudi Arabia 2 (Al Zaqaan 38, M Fallatah 45)
HT: 0-2
Latvia: Vanins - Dubra, Tarasovs, Kolesovs, Indrans, Kluskins (Ulimbasevs 59), Kazacoks (J Ikaunieks 46), Solovjovs (Sinelnikovs 46), A Visnakovs (Savalnieks 72), Sabala, Rakels (Hmizs 72).
Saudi Arabia: Al Maiouf - H Fallatah, Al Fatil (Osama Hawsawi 90), Al Khabrani, Al Obaid, Al Mogahwi, Otayf (Bakshween 46), Asiri (Al Moasher 74), Al Mousa (Al Sulayhem 75), M Fallatah (Assiri 68), Al Zaqaan (Al Jassim 57).

Wednesday, November 8

Nov 8 - Brazzaville
Congo 1 (Saint-Louis 42)
Benin 1 (Djigla 44)
HT: 1-1

Nov 8 - Doha, Qatar
Czech Republic 2 (Soucek 19, Sykora 65)
Iceland 1 (Kjartan Finnbogason 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Al Kuwari (Qat)
Czech Republic: Vaclik - Brabec, Suchy, Celustka, Soucek, Barak (Hruby 87), Novak, Husbauer (Frydek 62), Kopic (Sykora 62), Jankto (Falta 87), Krmencik (Sural 46).
Iceland: Runarsson - A Skulason, Hermannsson, Magnusson (R Gislason 46), Ingason, B Bjarnason (Traustason 60), J Gudmundsson (R Sigurjonsson 46), Arnason (E Bjarnason 46), O Skulason (Johannesson 83), Kjartansson, Kjartan Finnbogason (Kristjan Finnbogason 86).

Nov 8 - Maseru
Lesotho 1 (Kalake 90+1)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 0-0

Nov 8 - Diriamba
Nicaragua 0
Dominican Republic 3 (E Rodriguez 19, pen 78, Espinal 48)
HT: 0-1

Thursday, November 9

Nov 9 - Yerevan
Armenia 4 (Ozbiliz 41, Mkhitaryan 45, Hovsepyan 55, Vardanyan 84)
Belarus 1 (Saroka pen 58)
HT: 2-0
Armenia: Beglaryan - Mikaelyan, Andonian, Barseghyan (Koryan 76), Hambartsumyan, Hovsepyan, E Malakyan (Vardanyan 78), Pizzelli (Ishkhanyan 68), Mkhitaryan (A Grigoryan 75), Ozbiliz (Simonyan 46), Kadimyan (Daghbashyan 68).
Belarus: Gutor - Politevich, Naumov (Gavrilovich 82), Burko, Volodko, Bykov (Klimovich 46), Sedko (Kovalev 46), Karnitski (Evdokimov 78), Nekhaychik (Matveichyk 74), Korzun (Laptev 62), Saroka.

Nov 9 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 1 (Udom 50)
Myanmar 2 (Zaw Min Tun 15, Aung Thu 71)
HT: 0-1

Nov 9 - Helsinki
Finland 3 (Soiri 28, Lod 31, 54)
Estonia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,190. **Ref:** Nilsen (Nor)
Finland: Joronen - Arajuuri (Toivio 46), N Moisander (Pirinen 46), J Ojala, Granlund, Schuller (Lam 46), Lod (Skrabb 79), Kamara, Pukki (Jensen 46), Pohjanpalo, Soiri (Tuominen 60).
Estonia: Aksalu - Jaager, Teniste, Kallaste (Pikk 46), Tamm, Mets, Antonov (Sappinen 60), Lepistu (Artjom Dmitrijev 60), Kait (Mosnikov 79), Henri Anier (Baranov 85), Purje (Zenjov 46).

Nov 9 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 0
Bahrain 2 (Madan 80, Al Husaini 87)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,485

Nov 9 - Graz, Austria
Iran 2 (Dejagah pen 16, Ghoddos 19)
Panama 1 (G Torres pen 39)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Schuttengruber (Aut)
Iran: Beiranvand - Cheshmi, Ghafouri (Rezaeian 59), Pouraliganji (Hosseini 67), Ghoddos (Amiri 77), Abdollahzadeh, Ezatolahi (Karimi 59), Dejagah (Jahanbakhsh 67), Aghaei, Ansarifard, Taremi (Azmoun 59).
Panama: Calderon - Heraldez, Chen, J C Vargas (Escobar 46), Davis, M Vargas, Cooper, Sanchez (M A Murillo 36), Nunez (Diaz 46), Avila (Stephens 80), G Torres.

Nov 9 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 2 (Joachim 15, M Martins 84)
Hungary 1 (Nikolic 18)
HT: 1-1
Luxembourg: Moris - M Martins, Philipps, Malget, Janisch (Carlson 62), Rodrigues (Da Mota 46), C Martins (Holter 90+2), Mutsch (Sinani 62), O Thill (V Thill 46), Joachim (Skenderovic 85), Turpel.
Hungary: Kovacsik - Lovrencsics, Korcsmar, Kadar, Korhut, Patkai, A Nagy (Balogh 83), Dzsudzsak (Stieber 83), Ugrai (Bese 56), Nikolic (Priskin 74), Nemeth (Sallai 63).
Sent off: Lovrencsics 52.

Nov 9 - Cluj
Romania 2 (Grozav 42, 69)
Turkey 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 16,000. **Ref:** Lopes Martins (Por)
Romania: Pantilimon (Nita 71) - Sapunaru (Balasa 75), Chiriches, D Grigore, Tosca, Pintilii, Stanciu (Alibec 76), Deac (Torje 63), Budescu (Bicfalvi 72), Grozav, Keseru (Andone 66).
Turkey: Harun - Ozan (Baris 83), Serdar Aziz, Caglar, Atila Turan, Okay, Selcuk Inan (Cengiz 46), Yusuf (Malli 46), Ozyakup, Calhanoglu (Karaman 64), Tosun.

Nov 9 - Aberdeen
Scotland 0
Holland 1 (Depay 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 17,833. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)
Scotland: Gordon - Jack, Berra (Mulgrew 46), Tierney, Robertson, McLean, McGinn, Forrest (Fraser 71), McGregor (Cummings 87), Christie, Phillips.
Holland: Cillessen - Fosu-Mensah (Veltman 72), Van Dijk, Rekik, Ake, Wijnaldum, Blind, Strootman, Promes (Berghuis 76), Babel, Depay.

Nov 9 - Singapore
Singapore 0
Lebanon 1 (Hamam 18)
HT: 0-1

Friday, November 10

Nov10 - Brussels
Belgium 3 (E Hazard 18, R Lukaku 55, 70)
Mexico 3 (Guardado pen 39, Lozano 57, 61)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 40,965. **Ref:** Mazzoleni (Ita)
Belgium: Courtois - Meunier, Boyata, Ciman, Vermaelen, Chadli, De Bruyne (Mertens 46), Witsel, Tielemans (Dembele 46), E Hazard (T Hazard 85), R Lukaku (Origi 88).
Mexico: Ochoa - Salcedo, D Reyes (Alvarez 59; J Dos Santos 89), Araujo, Moreno, Layun, Lozano (Aquino 90+1), H Herrera, Guardado (Damm 70), Vela (G Dos Santos 59), J Hernandez (R Jimenez 51).

Nov10 - Guangzhou
China 0
Serbia 2 (Ljajic 20, A Mitrovic 69)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 17,160. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)
China: Yan Junling - Feng Xiaoting, Zheng Zheng, Li Xuepeng (Fu Huan 87), Zhang Linpeng, Zhao Yuhao (Zhao Xuri 55), Yu Hanchao (Xiao Zhi 46), Hao Junmin (Wu Xi 46), Wu Lei, Yin Hongbo (Wang Shenchao 66), Gao Lin (Yu Dabao 74).
Serbia: Stojkovic (Rajkovic 46) - D Tosic, Ivanovic (Veljkovic 73), Rukavina, Obradovic, Tadic (Gacinovic 85), Gudelj, Kostic (Zivkovic 60), Milinkovic-Savic, Ljajic (Krsticic 83), A Mitrovic (Prijovic 85).

Nov10 - London
England 0
Germany 0
Att: 81,382. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)
England: Pickford - Jones (Gomez 25), Stones, Maguire, Trippier (Walker 71), Livermore (Cork 86), Dier, Loftus-Cheek, Rose (Bertrand 71), Vardy (Lingard 86), Abraham (Rashford 60).
Germany: Ter Stegen - Ginter, Hummels, Rudiger, Kimmich, Gundogan (Rudy 86), Ozil, Halstenberg, Draxler (Can 67), Sane (Brandt 87), Werner (Wagner 73).

Nov10 - Paris
France 2 (Griezmann 18, Giroud 71)
Wales 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)
France: Mandanda - Jallet (Pavard 46), Koscielny, Umtiti, Kurzawa, Tolisso (Nzonzi 46), Matuidi, Mbappe (Thauvin 84), Griezmann (Fekir 63), Coman (Martial 73), Giroud (Lacazette 73).
Wales: Hennessey - Gunter, Chester, A Williams, B Davies (Woodburn 63), Taylor, Ledley (Ampadu 64), Allen, King (Brooks 64), Vokes (Lawrence 83), Ramsey.

Nov10 - Gori
Georgia 1 (Kvilitaia 24)
Cyprus 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Baliyan (Arm)
Georgia: Loria - Kakabadze, Khocholava, Kashia, Kankava, Kvekveskiri (Aburjania 82), Merebashvili (Sikharulidze 83), Papunashvili (Gvilia 74), Kazaishvili (Lobzhanidze 67), Kvilitaia (Kacharava 83), Navalovski (Grigalava 82).
Cyprus: Giorgallides - Merkis, Demetriou, Laifis, Efrem (Kastanos 65), Kyriakou (Avraam 73), Christofi (Mytidis 73), Laban (Fylaktou 65), Margaca (Vasiliou 82), Artymatas (Economides 82), Sotiriou.

Nov10 - Lille, France
Japan 1 (Makino 62)
Brazil 3 (Neymar 10, Marcelo 17, Gabriel Jesus 36)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 16,922. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)
Japan: Kawashima - H Sakai, Yoshida, Makino, Nagatomo, Yamaguchi, Hasebe (Morioka 70), Ideguchi (Endo 86), Haraguchi (Inui 70), Osako (Sugimoto 80), Kubo (Asano 46).
Brazil: Alisson (Cassio 46) - Danilo, Jemerson, Thiago Silva, Marcelo (Alex Sandro 59), Casemiro, Fernandinho, Giuliano (Renato Augusto 80), Willian (Taison 71), Gabriel Jesus (Diego Souza 58), Neymar (Douglas Costa 71).

Nov10 - Warsaw
Poland 0
Uruguay 0
Att: 56,147. **Ref:** Vad (Hun)
Poland: Boruc (Fabianski 45) - Cionek (Jedrzejczyk 46), Glik, Jach, Bereszynski, Krychowiak, Goralski (Zielinski 70), Rybus, Blaszczykowski (Maczynski 75), Grosicki (Makuszewski 90), Wilczek (Swierczok 66).
Uruguay: M Silva - Varela, Gimenez, Lemos, G Silva, Pereiro (C Rodriguez 60), Vecino, Bentancur, Nandez (Sanchez 67), De Arrascaeta (Gomez 74), Cavani.

Nov10 - Viseu
Portugal 3 (Manuel Fernandes 32, Goncalo Guedes 52, Joao Mario 90)
Saudi Arabia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Coltescu (Rom)
Portugal: Anthony Lopes - Joao Cancelo (Ricardo Pereira 46), Pepe (Edgar Ie 56), Luis Neto, Kevin Rodrigues, Bernardo Silva (Gelson Martins 56), Danilo Pereira (Ruben Neves 75), Manuel Fernandes (Bruno Fernandes 56), Joao Mario, Goncalo Guedes (Bruma 75), Andre Silva.
Saudi Arabia: Al Owais - M Hawsawi, Osama Hawsawi, Omar Hawsawi, Al Burayk (Al Mowalad 70), Otayf (Al Mousa 80), Al Khaibri (Bakshween 80), Al Shahrani, Al Shehri (Al Jassim 53), Al Hazzaa (Assiri 70), Al Dawsari (Al Moasher 65).

Nov10 - Suwon
South Korea 2 (Son Heung-min 11, 62)
Colombia 1 (C Zapata 75)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Kim Jin-su, Kwon Kyung-won, Jang Hyun-soo, Choi Chul-soon, Lee Jae-sung (Yeom Ki-hun 82), Ki Sung-yueng, Go Yo-han (Koo Ja-cheol 82), Kwon Chang-hoon (Lee Chang-min 89), Son Heung-min, Lee Keun-ho (Lee Jeong-hyeop 46).
Colombia: Castellanos - Medina (Lerma 82), C Zapata, D Sanchez, Tesillo (Fabra 61), Uribe (Cardona 46), Aguilar, Moreno (C Sanchez 46), Hurtado (Pardo 71), D Zapata (Bacca 64), Rodriguez.

Nov10 - Lviv
Ukraine 2 (Yarmolenko 39, Konoplyanka 54)
Slovakia 1 (Stetina 10)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lat)
Ukraine: Pyatov (Koval 46) - Karavaev (Butko 63), Khacheridi (Shabanov 81), Ordets, Sobol, Yarmolenko, Rotan, Malinovskyi (Shakhov 81), Konoplyanka (Myakushko 89), Marlos (Andriyevskyi 77), Kolomoets.
Slovakia: Dubravka (Polacek 46) - Gyomber (Sabo 46), Skrtel, Stetina (Lobotka 46), Hubocan, Skriniar, Hrosovsky, Duda, Hamsik (Bero 63), Rusnak, Nemec (Mak 63).

Nov10 - Al Ain
United Arab Emirates 0
Haiti 1 (Khamis og 25)
HT: 0-1

Saturday, November 11

Nov11 - Saint-Leu-la-Foret, France
Comoros 1 (Y M'Changama 54)
Madagascar 1 (Razakanantenaina 6)
HT: 0-1

Nov11 - San Cristobal
Dominican Republic 1 (E Rodriguez pen 85)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 0-0

Nov11 - Skopje
Macedonia 2 (Pandev 43, K Markoski 90+4)
Norway 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Jakupovic (Bos)
Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Ristovski, Ristevski, Zajkov, Spirovski, D Velkoski, Bardhi (Nikolov 76), Pandev (Trickovski 69), Trajkovski (Hasani 58), Alioski (K Markoski 89), Radeski (Tosevski 84).
Norway: Grytebust - Valsvik, Linnes (Daehli 46), Svensson, Meling, Nordtveit, Henriksen, Selnaes (M Elyounoussi 75), Odegaard (Thorsby 69), Kamara (Trondsen 79), Sorloth (Kirkevold 46).

Nov11 - Lilongwe
Malawi 1 (C Chirwa 52)
Lesotho 1 (Tseka 45)
HT: 0-1

Nov11 - Windhoek
Namibia 3 (Somaeb 14, pen 42, Shalulile 18)
Zimbabwe 1 (Ndoro pen 32)
HT: 3-1

Nov11 - Doha
Qatar 0
Czech Republic 1 (Barak 15)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000
Czech Republic: Pavlenka - Boril, Coufal, Kalas, Simic, Husbauer (Jankto 62), Sykora (Kopic 46), Houska (Hruby 46), Falta (Frydek 62), Barak (Soucek 74), Kliment (Sural 46).

Nov11 - Moscow
Russia 0
Argentina 1 (Aguero 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 78,750. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Russia: Akinfeev - Kudryashov, Vasin, Raush (Zabolotniy 88), Mario Fernandes (Smolnikov 46), Dzhikiya, Glushakov, Kuzyaev (Erokhin 69), Smolov, Kokorin (Aleksey Miranchuk 82), Poloz (Dzagoev 46).
Argentina: Romero - Mascherano, Pezzella, Otamendi, E Perez (Banega 87), Di Maria (Perotti 75), Salvio (Pavon 78), Kranevitter, Lo Celso (A Gomez 59), Messi, Aguero (Dybala 87).

Nov11 - Malaga
Spain 5 (Jordi Alba 6, Morata 23, Silva 51, 55, Iniesta 73)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)
Spain: Arrizabalaga - Odriozola, Pique (Bartra 46), Sergio Ramos (Nacho 46), Jordi Alba, Busquets (Saul 46), Thiago, Iniesta (Luis Alberto 74), Silva, Isco (Marco Asensio 65), Morata (Iago Aspas 46).
Costa Rica: Carvajal - Oviedo (Matarrita 66), Duarte (Gonzalez 56), Gamboa, Waston (Gutierrez 63), Calvo, Borges, Bolanos (Wallace 60), Venegas (O Rodriguez 75), Tejeda, Urena (Ortiz 56).

Nov11 - Couva
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (Boatswain 89, Molino 90+2)
Grenada 2 (Baptiste 49, Modeste 72)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, November 12

Nov12 - Cotonou
Benin 1 (Sessegnon pen 32)
Tanzania 1 (Maguri 52)
HT: 1-0

Nov12 - Valletta
Malta 0
Estonia 3 (Sappinen 1, Mosnikov pen 14, Henri Anier 90)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 2,796. **Ref:** Nuza (Kos)
Malta: Bonello - Agius, S Borg, Baldacchino, Z Muscat (J Zerafa 46), Schembri (S Pisani 59), R Fenech (Effiong 70), R Muscat (P Fenech 65), Gambin (Failla 78), M Mifsud, J P Farrugia (Nwoko 59).
Estonia: Meerits - Mool (Teniste 66), Baranov (Tamm 58), Vihmann, Mets, Pikk, Zenjov (Henri Anier 78), Artjom Dmitrijev, Antonov (Kait 55), Mosnikov (Purje 65), Sappinen (Lepistu 83).

Nov12 - Lome
Togo 6 (Dossevi 19, Laba 26, 54, 87, 90, Adebayor 76)
Mauritius 0
HT: 2-0

Monday, November 13

Nov13 - Yerevan
Armenia 3 (Ishkhanyan 16, Haroyan 38, Mkhitaryan pen 63)
Cyprus 2 (Laifis 50, Sotiriou 89)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Vadachkoria (Geo)
Armenia: Beglaryan - Daghbashyan, Haroyan, Ishkhanyan, Mkhitaryan (Andonian 79), E Malakyan (Artak Yedigaryan 62), Pizzelli (Barseghyan 46), K Hovhannisyan (Simonyan 75), Hovsepyan, Kadimyan (Ozbiliz 71), Koryan (A Grigoryan 62).
Cyprus: Pardo - Antoniades, Merkis, Kyriakou, Economides (Laifis 46), Christofi (Avraam 58), Demetriou (Artymatas 69), Margaca (Laban 46), Fylaktou, Kastanos (Sotiriou 46), Mytidis.

Nov13 - Lisbon, Portugal
Bulgaria 1 (I Popov 81)
Saudi Arabia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Verissimo (Por)
Bulgaria: P Iliev - M Aleksandrov, Bodurov, Bozhikov, Nedyalkov, Nedelev (Galabinov 65), Slavchev (G Milanov 63), Kostadinov, I Popov (Minchev 90+1), Delev (Tonev 76), Raynov.
Saudi Arabia: Abdullah - Al Mowalad, Al Khabrani, Al Fatil, Al Harbi, Al Mousa (Al Fraidi 90+1), Al Sulayhem (Bakshween 65), Al Zaqaan (H Fallatah 77), Al Jassim (Asiri 61), Al Moasher (Al Shehri 71), Assiri. *Sent off: Al Harbi 83.*

Nov13 - Kutaisi
Georgia 2 (Sikharulidze 35, Dvali 50)
Belarus 2 (Stasevich 24, Nekhaychik 66)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Baliyan (Arm)
Georgia: Kvaskhvadze - Kashia (Dvali 46), Khocholava, Gegetchkori (Kakabadze 88), Shergelashvili, Kankava (Merebashvili 62), Aburjania, Jigauri (Kvilitaia 62), Papunashvili, Gvilia (Kacharava 88), Sikharulidze (Kazaishvili 80).
Belarus: Ignatovich (Pavlyuchenko 46) - Politevich, Volodko (Matveichyk 63), Gavrilovich, Rios, Stasevich (Pavlovets 88), Karnitski (Nekhaychik 56), Bykov, Korzun, Kovalev (Klimovich 82), Laptev.

Nov13 - Nijmegen, Holland
Iran 1 (Jahanbakhsh 57)
Venezuela 0
HT: 0-0. *Played behind closed doors.*
Ref: Van Boekel (Hol)
Iran: Beiranvand (Mazaheri 46) - Rezaeian, Hosseini (Ebrahimi 61), Amiri, Dejagah (Ghoddos 46), Pouraliganji, Ezatolahi (Imani 46), A Karimi, Hajsafi, Ghoochannejhad (Azmoun 61), Jahanbakhsh (K Rezaei 61).
Venezuela: Farinez (Contreras 46) - Angel, Quijada, Chancellor, R Hernandez, Figuera (Romero 46), Anor (Soteldo 58), Herrera (Blondell 87), S Rondon, Machis (Lucena 75), Murillo.

Nov13 - Karbala
Iraq 1 (Jenyat og 43)
Syria 1 (Al Khatib 19)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 30,000

Nov13 - Mitrovica
Kosovo 4 (Rrahmani 13, Muriqi 45, Rashani 86, Halimi 90+4)
Latvia 3 (Kluskins 11, 59, D Ikaunieks 30)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Jorgji (Alb)
Kosovo: Ujkani (Hajdini 68) - Aliti (Thaci 83), Rrahmani, Vojvoda, Dallku (L Kastrati 70), V Berisha, Kryeziu, Halimi, Bernard Berisha (Nuhiu 75), Rashica (Sahiti 75), Muriqi (Rashani 70).
Latvia: Vanins - Dubra, Tarasovs, Kolesovs (Oss 80), J Ikaunieks (Rakels 82), Indrans, Kluskins (Hmizs 70), Maksimenko (Sinelnikovs 40), Gabovs, Sabala (Ulimbasevs 66), D Ikaunieks.

Nov13 - Gdansk
Poland 0
Mexico 1 (R Jimenez 13)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 32,736. **Ref:** Drachta (Aut)
Poland: Szczesny - Jedrzejczyk (Wszolek 46), Cionek, Jach, Kedziora, Linetty (Wolski 62), Maczynski, Rybus (Kurzawa 83), Zielinski, Swierczok (Stepinski 71), Makuszewski (Blaszczykowski 76).
Mexico: J J Corona - Salcedo (Araujo 46), Ayala (Montes 46), Moreno (Vela 63), Gallardo, Layun, Reyes, J Dos Santos (Govea 74), Guardado, Aquino (Lozano 46), R Jimenez (Peralta 46).

Nov13 - Antalya
Turkey 2 (Cengiz 47, Akbaba 61)
Albania 3 (Sadiku 24, 39, Grezda 55)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Kabakov (Bul)
Turkey: Volkan Babacan - Baris (Ozan 46), Serdar Aziz (Ugur 46), Caglar, Atila Turan (Ismail 46), Ozyakup, Okay, Karaman (Akbaba 60), Calhanoglu (Yusuf 75), Cengiz (Enes 71), Tosun.
Albania: Berisha - Hysaj, Veseli, Mavraj, Lenjani (Ajeti 67), Roshi (Qaka 67), Xhaka, Lilaj (Lila 86), Grezda (Ajdarevic 81), Sadiku (Aliji 67), Memushaj. *Sent off: Memushaj 41.*

Tuesday, November 14

Nov14 - Algiers
Algeria 3 (Brahimi 39, 71, Slimani 85)
Central African Republic 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Guirat (Tun)
Algeria: Salhi (Rahmani 51) - Arous, Mandi, Cadamuro (Chafai 77), Abdellaoui (Ferhani 56), Medjani (Bennacer 61), Ferhat, Mahrez, Brahimi (Bounedjah 73), Djabou (Hanni 56), Slimani.

Nov14 - Krasnodar, Russia
Argentina 2 (Banega 27, Aguero 37)
Nigeria 4 (Iheanacho 44, Iwobi 53, 74, Idowu 55)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Bezborodov (Rus)
Argentina: Marchesin - Mascherano, Pezzella (Insua 80), Otamendi, E Perez, Banega, Lo Celso (A Gomez 58), Pavon (Perotti 78), Dybala (Belluschi 63), Di Maria (Rigoni 78), Aguero (Benedetto 46).
Nigeria: Akpeyi (Uzoho 46) - Shehu (Ebuehi 46), Awaziem, Troost-Ekong, Balogun (Omeruo 61), Aina (Idowu 46), Ndidi, Mikel, Ogu, Iheanacho (Musa 70), Iwobi (Kayode 87).

Nov14 - Vienna
Austria 2 (Sabitzer 5, Schaub 86)
Uruguay 1 (Cavani 9)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 11,700. **Ref:** Bognar (Hun)
Austria: Lindner - Bauer, Danso, Dragovic, Ulmer, Sabitzer (Schwab 89), Grillitsch (Schopf 73), Baumgartlinger, Kainz (Schaub 58), Burgstaller (Lazaro 73), Arnautovic (Alar 85).
Uruguay: M Silva - M Pereira, Gimenez, Godin, G Silva, Vecino, Valverde (Lodeiro 79), Bentancur, De Arrascaeta (Sanchez 62), Urretaviscaya (Stuani 68), Cavani (Gomez 74).

Nov14 - Bruges
Belgium 1 (R Lukaku 72)
Japan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)
Belgium: Mignolet - Kabasele, Vermaelen, Vertonghen, Meunier, De Bruyne (Dembele 62), Witsel (Defour 84), Chadli (J Lukaku 84), T Hazard, Mertens (Mirallas 60), R Lukaku (Origi 74).
Japan: Kawashima - H Sakai (G Sakai 86), Yoshida, Makino, Nagatomo, Nagasawa (Morioka 62), Asano (Kubo 68), Ideguchi, Yamaguchi, Haraguchi (Inui 78), Osako (Sugimoto 73).

Nov14 - Chongqing
China 0
Colombia 4 (Pardo 6, Bacca 61, Borja 66, 90+1)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Iida (Jap)
China: Yan Junling - Wang Shenchao (He Guan 46), Zhang Linpeng, Feng Xiaoting, Jiang Zhipeng (Zheng Zheng 63), Zhao Xuri (Yin Hongbo 71), Hao Junmin (Fu Huan 34), Wu Xi, Yu Dabao, Xiao Zhi (Gao Lin 46), Wu Lei.
Colombia: Jose Cuadrado - Lerma, Mina, D Sanchez (O Murillo 72), Fabra (Alvarez Balanta 75), Pardo (Hurtado 72), Aguilar (Barrios 65), C Sanchez, G Moreno, Bacca (Uribe 68), D Zapata (Borja 46).

Nov14 - London
England 0
Brazil 0
Att: 84,595. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
England: Hart - Gomez, Stones, Maguire, Walker, Dier, Loftus-Cheek (Lingard 35), Livermore (Rose 90), Bertrand (Young 80), Rashford (Abraham 75), Vardy (Solanke 75).
Brazil: Alisson - Daniel Alves, Marquinhos, Miranda, Marcelo, Casemiro, Renato Augusto (Fernandinho 68), Paulinho, Philippe Coutinho (Willian 68), Gabriel Jesus (Roberto Firmino 76), Neymar.

Nov14 - Franceville
Gabon 0
Botswana 0

Nov14 - Cologne
Germany 2 (Werner 56, Stindl 90+3)
France 2 (Lacazette 34, 71)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 36,948. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Germany: Trapp - Can (Stindl 83), Sule, Hummels (Rudiger 46), Plattenhardt, Khedira (Rudy 75), Kroos, Gundogan (Gotze 65), Ozil, Draxler, Werner (Wagner 85).
France: Mandanda - Jallet (Pavard 64), Varane, Umtiti, Digne (Kurzawa 82), Rabiot, Tolisso, Matuidi (Nzonzi 64), Mbappe, Martial, Lacazette (Griezmann 76).

Nov14 - Budapest
Hungary 1 (Nikolic 37)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 9,860. **Ref:** Harkam (Aut)
Hungary: Dibusz - Bese, Vinicius (Korcsmar 11), Kadar, Szabo, J Varga, Patkai (A Nagy 11), Priskin (Bode 59), D Nagy (Nemeth 76), Ugrai (Stieber 90+1), Nikolic (Markvart 81).
Costa Rica: Moreira - Gamboa (Oviedo 60), Duarte (Calvo 51), Gonzalez, Gutierrez, Matarrita, Colindres (Bolanos 76), Borges, O Rodriguez (Urena 88), Wallace (Ortiz 61), Venegas (Segura 67).

Nov14 - Leiria
Portugal 1 (Antunes 31)
United States 1 (McKennie 21)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 19,017. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Portugal: Beto - Nelson Semedo, Pepe (Luis Neto 10), Ricardo Ferreira, Antunes, Bruno Fernandes (Joao Mario 46), Danilo Pereira (Ruben Neves 62), Manuel Fernandes, Bruma (Bernardo Silva 62), Gelson Martins (Goncalo Paciencia 46), Goncalo Guedes (Rony Lopes 81).
United States: Horvath (Hamid 46) - Yedlin, Miazga, Brooks (Carter-Vickers 46), Lichaj (Villafana 59), Williams, Adams, McKennie (Bedoya 84), Acosta, Agudelo (Gooch 59), Sapong (Dwyer 77).

Nov14 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Muntari 90+1)
Iceland 1 (Kjartansson 26)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,758. **Ref:** Al Yaqoubi (Oma)
Iceland: Kristinsson (I Jonsson 46) - D Johannesson (E Bjarnason 64), R Sigurdsson (Hermannsson 46), Fjoluson, A Skulason (A Gunnarsson 79), R Gislason, R Sigurjonsson, Smarason (Ingason 46), Traustason, G Sigurdsson, Kjartansson (Kjartan Finnbogason 46).

Nov14 - Bucharest
Romania 0
Holland 3 (Depay 47, Babel 56, L De Jong 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 26,000. **Ref:** Nicolaides (Cyp)
Romania: Pantilimon - Hanca (Grozav 63), Chiriches, Moti, Ganea, Chipciu, Hoban (Pintilii 74), Bicfalvi (Alibec 66), Tanase (Torje 63), Budescu (Stanciu 46), Tucudean (Andone 46).
Holland: Cillessen - Veltman, De Ligt, Van Dijk, Ake, Propper (Van Ginkel 62), Blind (Promes 87), Strootman (Vilhena 77), Berghuis (Van de Beek 82), Babel (L De Jong 62), Depay (Sneijder 61).

Nov14 - St Petersburg
Russia 3 (Smolov 41, 70, Aleksey Miranchuk 51)
Spain 3 (Jordi Alba 8, Sergio Ramos pen 35, pen 53)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 45,486. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Russia: Lunev - Smolnikov (Ignatyev 87), Dzhikiya, Vasin, Kudryashov (Raush 75), Zhirkov (Kombarov 82), Glushakov, Kuzyaev (Erokhin 62), Dzagoev (Kokorin 62), Smolov, Aleksey Miranchuk (Anton Miranchuk 67).
Spain: De Gea - Nacho, Pique, Sergio Ramos (Vitolo 58), Jordi Alba (Moreno 46), Thiago (Saul 60), Busquets (Silva 58), Iniesta (Illarramendi 46), Suso (Callejon 46), Rodrigo, Marco Asensio.

Nov14 - Trnava
Slovakia 1 (Lobotka 90+1)
Norway 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 5,973. **Ref:** Farkas (Hun)
Slovakia: Kozacik - Pekarik, Skrtel, Durica, Hubocan (Mazan 63), Lobotka, Skriniar (Kiss 64), Hamsik (Duda 63), Mak (Bero 74), Nemec, Rusnak (Mihalik 63).
Norway: Jarstein - Linnes, Nordtveit (Skjelvik 46), Reginiussen, Meling, M Elyounoussi (Svensson 90), Henriksen, Trondsen, Berget (Daehli 70), Soderlund (Kamara 70), Sorloth.

Nov14 - Ulsan
South Korea 1 (Koo Ja-cheol pen 62)
Serbia 1 (Ljajic 59)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,560. **Ref:** Ma (Chn)
South Korea: Cho Hyun-woo - Choi Chul-soon, Jang Hyun-soo, Kim Young-gwon, Kim Min-woo (Kim Jin-su 82), Kwon Chang-hoon (Lee Myeong-joo 80), Jung Woo-young, Ki Sung-yueng (Ju Se-jong 85), Lee Jae-sung (Yeom Ki-hun 80), Koo Ja-cheol (Lee Keun-ho 70), Son Heung-min.
Serbia: Stojkovic (Dimitrovic 46) - Rukavina (Aksentijevic 90), B Ivanovic (Veljkovic 68), Vukovic, Obradovic, Nemanja Maksimovic, Grujic, Zivkovic (Radonjic 80), Milinkovic-Savic (Gacinovic 74), Ljajic, Prijovic.

Nov14 - Couva
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (S Winchester 60)
Guyana 1 (Holder 19)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gaymes (SVG)

Nov14 - Al Ain
United Arab Emirates 1 (Mabkhout 15)
Uzbekistan 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Khudair (Sau)
Sent off: M Ahmed (UAE) 90+3

Nov14 - Cardiff
Wales 1 (Lawrence 75)
Panama 1 (Cooper 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vertenten (Blg)
Wales: Ward - Gunter, Chester, B Davies (Lockyer 46), Taylor, Ampadu (Crofts 67), D Edwards (Evans 62), Brooks (Watkins 71), Lawrence, Woodburn (Hedges 71), Vokes (Bradshaw 46).
Panama: Penedo - M A Murillo, Baloy, Escobar, Ovalle, Cooper, Heraldez (Gonzalez 75), M Vargas (Buitrago 70), Avila (J Vargas 67), B Perez (Stephens 87), G Torres (Diaz 64).

UNDER-17 WORLD CUP

Played in India

Group A
Oct 6: Colombia 0 Ghana 1; India 0 USA 3.
Oct 9: Ghana 0 USA 1; India 1 Colombia 2.
Oct 12: Ghana 4 India 0; USA 1 Colombia 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	1	6
Colombia (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
USA (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
India	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

Group B
Oct 6: New Zealand 1 Turkey 1; Paraguay 3 Mali 2.
Oct 9: Turkey 0 Mali 3; Paraguay 4 New Zealand 2.
Oct 12: Mali 3 New Zealand 1; Turkey 1 Paraguay 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paraguay (Q)	3	3	0	0	10	5	9
Mali (Q)	3	2	0	1	8	4	6
New Zealand	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Turkey	3	0	1	2	2	7	1

Group C
Oct 7: Germany 2 Costa Rica 1; Iran 3 Guinea 1.
Oct 10: Costa Rica 2 Guinea 2; Iran 4 Germany 0.
Oct 13: Costa Rica 0 Iran 3; Guinea 1 Germany 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (Q)	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Germany (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	6	6
Guinea	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Costa Rica	3	0	1	2	3	7	1

Group D
Oct 7: Brazil 2 Spain 1; North Korea 0 Niger 1.
Oct 10: Spain 4 Niger 0; North Korea 0 Brazil 2.
Oct 13: Niger 0 Brazil 2; Spain 2 North Korea 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (Q)	3	3	0	0	6	1	9
Spain (Q)	3	2	0	1	7	2	6
Niger (Q)	3	1	0	2	1	6	3
North Korea	3	0	0	3	0	5	0

Group E
Oct 8: New Caledonia 1 France 7; Honduras 1 Japan 6.
Oct 11: France 2 Japan 1; Honduras 5 New Caledonia 0.
Oct 14: France 5 Honduras 1; Japan 1 New Caledonia 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France (Q)	3	3	0	0	14	3	9
Japan (Q)	3	1	1	1	8	4	4
Honduras (Q)	3	1	0	2	7	11	3
New Caledonia	3	0	1	2	2	13	1

Group F
Oct 8: Chile 0 England 4; Iraq 1 Mexico 1.
Oct 11: England 3 Mexico 2; Iraq 3 Chile 0.
Oct 14: Mexico 0 Chile 0; England 4 Iraq 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England (Q)	3	3	0	0	11	2	9
Iraq (Q)	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Mexico (Q)	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Chile	3	0	1	2	0	7	1

● *The top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed countries with the best record qualified for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

1st knockout round (last 16)
Oct 16: Colombia 0 Germany 4; Paraguay 0 United States 5.
Oct 17: Iran 2 Mexico 1; France 1 Spain 2; England 0 Japan 0 (England 5-3 on pens); Mali 5 Iraq 1.
Oct 18: Ghana 2 Niger 0; Brazil 3 Honduras 0.

Quarter-finals
Oct 21: Mali 2 Ghana 1; United States 1 England 4.
Oct 22: Spain 3 Iran 1; Germany 1 Brazil 2.

Semi-finals
Oct 25: Brazil 1 England 3; Mali 1 Spain 3.

3rd-place match
Oct 28: Brazil 2 Mali 0.

Final
Oct 28 - Kolkata
England 5 (Brewster 44, Gibbs-White 58, Foden 69, 88, Guehi 84)
Spain 2 (Sergio Gomez 10, 31)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 66,684. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
England: Anderson - Sessegnon, Latibeaudiere, Guehi, Panzo, Oakley-Boothe (Gomes 90), McEachran (Gallagher 87), Foden, Gibbs-White (Kirby 81), Hudson-Odoi, Brewster.
Spain: Alvaro Fernandez - Mateu Morey, Victor Chust, Hugo Guillamon, Juan Miranda, Antonio Blanco (Carlos Beitia 81), Moha (Nacho Diaz 85), Ferran Torres, Cesar Gelabert (Lara 72), Sergio Gomez, Abel Ruiz.

Club football

EUROPE

ESTONIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flora (C)	36	28	6	2	100	28	90
Levadia	36	25	9	2	106	20	84
Kalju	36	24	6	6	101	32	78
FCI	36	20	5	11	103	47	65
Trans	36	13	6	17	46	63	45
Paide	36	10	8	18	47	88	38
Tammeka	36	9	10	17	40	63	37
Sillamae (R)[1]	36	10	6	20	52	76	36
Tulevik	36	8	4	24	34	95	28
Vaprus	36	2	2	32	29	146	8

[1]*Relegated after being refused licence for next season because of financial difficulties*

FINLAND

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HJK (C)	33	23	7	3	78	16	76
KuPS	33	16	8	9	51	36	56
Ilves	33	15	11	7	39	35	56
Lahti	33	12	13	8	46	31	49
Mariehamn	33	13	10	10	44	42	49
SJK	33	13	8	12	42	47	47
RoPS	33	12	6	15	43	51	42
VPS	33	9	12	12	38	51	39
Inter	33	10	8	15	54	57	38
PS Kemi	33	8	8	17	38	59	32
HIFK (R)[1]	33	6	11	16	37	54	29
JJK (R)	33	6	8	19	32	63	26

[1]*Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

KAZAKHSTAN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Astana (C)	33	25	4	4	74	21	79
Kairat	33	23	9	1	75	28	78
Ordabasy	33	18	4	11	44	37	58
Irtysh	33	12	12	9	35	32	48
Tobol	33	12	11	10	36	26	47
Kaysar	33	11	9	13	30	36	42
Shakhter	33	12	4	17	36	50	40
Atyrau[2]	33	10	8	15	34	54	35
Aktobe	33	8	9	16	38	46	33
Akzhayik[1]	33	7	9	17	29	47	30
Taraz[3] (R)	33	8	8	17	29	50	26
Okzhetpes (R)	33	7	3	23	28	61	24

[1]*Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*
[2]*3pts deducted for failing to pay former player*
[3]*6pts deducted for failing to pay former player*

LATVIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spartaks (C)	24	14	4	6	36	26	46
FK Liepaja	24	11	4	9	32	25	37
Riga FC	24	10	7	7	28	20	37
Ventspils	24	9	8	7	32	22	35
RFS	24	11	2	11	29	31	35
Jelgava	24	8	5	11	22	30	29
Metta/LU[1]	24	3	6	15	21	46	15
Babite[2] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1]*Enter rel/prom play-off*
[2]*Excluded from the league mid-season on suspicion of being involved with match-fixing; results expunged*

LITHUANIA

After the 28-round regular season, the top 6 formed the championship group (carrying forward their full regular-season record), 7th-placed (second bottom) team Stumbras went into the rel/prom play-off – which they won to stay in the top division – and the 8th-placed (bottom) team, Kauno, were relegated

2017 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Suduva (C)	33	21	8	4	73	31	71
Zalgiris	33	20	7	6	62	31	67
Trakai	33	18	10	5	53	27	64
Jonava	33	10	8	15	40	53	38
Atlantas	33	8	12	13	39	43	36
Utenis	33	8	9	16	30	56	33

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cork (C)	33	24	4	5	67	23	76
Dundalk	33	22	3	8	72	24	69
Shamrock	33	17	3	13	49	41	54
Derry	33	14	9	10	49	40	51
Bohemians	33	14	5	14	36	40	47
Bray	33	13	7	13	55	52	46
Limerick	33	10	10	13	41	51	40
St Patrick's	33	9	12	12	45	52	39
Sligo	33	8	15	10	33	44	39
Galway (R)	33	7	14	12	45	50	35
Finn Harps (R)	33	9	3	21	35	67	30
Drogheda (R)	33	5	7	21	22	65	22

SWEDEN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malmo (C)	30	19	7	4	63	27	64
AIK	30	16	9	5	47	22	57
Djurgarden	30	15	8	7	54	30	53
Hacken	30	14	10	6	42	28	52
Ostersund	30	13	11	6	48	32	50
Norrkoping	30	14	6	10	45	40	48
Sirius	30	11	7	12	46	51	40
Elfsborg	30	10	9	11	53	59	39
Hammarby	30	9	11	10	42	43	38
Gothenburg	30	9	10	11	42	40	37
Orebro	30	10	6	14	38	54	36
Kalmar	30	9	5	16	30	49	32
Sundsvall	30	7	10	13	29	46	31
Jonkoping (R)[1]	30	6	12	12	31	46	30
Halmstad (R)	30	5	9	16	29	45	24
Eskilstuna (R)	30	4	8	18	28	55	20

[1]*Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

CONCACAF

CONCACAF LEAGUE

Final
1st leg
Oct19
Olimpia (Hnd) 0
Santos de Guapiles (CR) 1 (Azofeifa 62)
HT: 0-0. *Played behind closed doors.*
Ref: Elfath (USA)

2nd leg
Oct 26
Santos de Guapiles 0
Olimpia 1 (Chirinos 21)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,460. **Ref:** Santander (Mex)
Agg1-1; Olimpia 4-1 on pens

● *As winners, Olimpia have qualified for the 2018 CONCACAF Champions League*

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals
1st legs
Oct 24
River Plate (Arg) 1 (Scocco 82)
Lanus (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

Oct 25
Barcelona (Ecu) 0
Gremio (Bra) 3 (Luan 8, 51, Edilson 21)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

2nd legs
Oct 31
Lanus 4 (Sand 45+1, 46, Acosta 62, Silva pen 69)
River Plate 2 (Scocco pen 18, Montiel 23)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Sent off: Fernandez (River Plate) 90+2
Lanus 4-3 on agg

Nov1
Gremio 0
Barcelona 1 (Alvez 33)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tobar (Chl)
Sent off: Alvez (Barcelona) 90+5
Gremio 3-1 on agg

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Oct 24-26; 2nd legs - Nov1/2

Fluminense (Bra) v Flamengo (Bra)
0-1, 3-3 (agg 3-4)
Libertad (Par) v Racing Club (Arg)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Nacional (Par) v Independiente (Arg)
1-4, 0-2 (agg 1-6)
Sport Recife (Bra) v Junior (Col)
0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

1st leg

Oct 28

Al Ahly (Egy) 1 (Zakaria 3)
Wydad Casablanca (Mor) 1 (Bencharki 16)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 60,000. **Ref:** Tessema Weyesa (Eth)
Al Ahly: Ekramy - Fathy, Samir, Naguib, Maaloul, El Sulaya, Rabia (Hamoudi 78), Zakaria, A Said, Ajayi (Soliman 63; Moteab 86), Azaro.
Wydad Casablanca: Laaroubi - Noussir, Rabeh, Ouattara, El Karti, Nekkach, Ounajem (Khadrouf 27), Saidi, Gaddarine, Bencharki, El Haddad (Daho 83).

2nd leg

Nov 4

Wydad Casablanca 1 (El Karti 69)
Al Ahly 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 65,000. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)
Wydad Casablanca 2-1 on agg
Wydad Casablanca: Laaroubi - Noussir, Rabeh, Atouchi, Gaddarine, Khadrouf (El Hachimi 86), El Karti, Nekkach, Saidi, El Haddad (Ouattara 90+3), Bencharki.
Al Ahly: Ekramy - Hany, Rabia, Samir, El Sayed (Soliman 77), El Sulaya, Fathy (Moteab 72), Zakaria, A Said, Ajayi, Azaro (Hamoudi 60).

ANGOLA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 de Agosto (C)	30	19	8	3	44	14	65
Petro Atletico	30	20	2	8	46	20	62
S Esperanca	30	15	8	7	34	23	53
Kabuscorp	30	13	11	6	40	29	50
Interclube	30	12	12	6	34	19	48
Recreativo L	30	13	9	8	41	23	48
Recreativo C	30	12	5	13	24	27	41
Desp'vo Huila	30	11	8	11	23	28	41
Progresso S'ga	30	11	8	11	34	30	41
1 de Maio	30	12	4	14	40	49	40
Bravos Maquis	30	8	9	13	19	26	33
Progresso LS	30	8	8	14	28	39	32
Academica	30	8	6	16	39	53	30
JGM (R)	30	8	6	16	26	55	30
AS Aviacao (R)	30	6	8	16	21	37	26
Santa Rita (R)	30	4	8	18	24	45	20

KENYA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gor Mahia (C)	34	22	8	4	53	22	74
Sofapaka	34	15	10	9	48	31	55
Kari'gi Sharks	34	13	13	8	42	26	52
Posta Rangers	34	11	18	5	28	22	51
K Homeboyz	34	12	14	8	30	23	50
Tusker	34	14	8	12	33	34	50
Ulinzi Stars	34	12	12	10	37	29	48
Leopards	34	12	9	13	26	28	45
Nzoia Sugar	34	11	11	12	41	40	44
Bandari	34	12	7	15	34	33	43
SoNy Sugar	34	10	13	11	31	30	43
Zoo Kericho	34	9	13	12	39	49	40
Mathare Utd	34	8	15	11	32	36	39
Chemelil Sugar	34	8	15	11	28	34	39
Nakumatt (R)	34	10	9	15	33	41	39
Thika Utd (R)	34	8	14	12	27	36	38
W Stima (R)	34	9	11	14	31	41	38
M'oni Youth (R)	34	5	10	19	27	65	25

MADAGASCAR

2017 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CNaPS (C)	6	6	0	0	15	4	18
Elgeco	6	4	0	2	17	11	12
COSFA	6	1	1	4	8	16	4
HZAM	6	0	1	5	6	15	1

MOZAMBIQUE

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uniao Songo (C)	30	19	7	4	38	15	64
Costa do Sol	30	16	8	6	41	19	56
F'viario Nac'a	30	14	8	8	27	19	50
F'viario Beira	30	11	12	7	36	27	45
Dvo Nacala	30	10	14	6	23	18	44
LD Maputo	30	12	8	10	40	30	44
Chibuto	30	11	10	9	28	28	43
F'viario Maputo	30	12	7	11	26	24	43
ENH Vil'kulo	30	9	13	8	27	25	40
F'viario Nam'a	30	7	16	7	22	20	37
Textafrica	30	10	7	13	27	38	37
Maxaquene	30	8	10	12	25	28	34
1 de Maio	30	8	10	12	30	36	34
Chingale (R)	30	8	6	16	30	44	30
UP Lichinga (R)	30	6	8	16	15	30	26
Macuacua (R)	30	4	6	20	13	47	18

ASIA

AFC CUP

Final

(single leg only)

Nov 4 - Hisor, Tajikistan

Istiklol (Taj) 0
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 1 (E Mohsin 68)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Abdulla Hassan (UAE)
Istiklol: Stosic - Stetsenko, Baranovskyi, Asrorov, Nazarov, Aliev (R Dzhalilov 74), Davronov (Juraboev 72), Mawutor, Fatkhulloev, Barkov, M Dzhalilov (Vasiev 74).
Al Quwa Al Jawiya: Talib - Sameh Saeed, Samal Saeed, Antic, Bahjat, Bari (Abdul-Ridha 90), Midani, Mobayed, Tariq, Ahmad, E Mohsin (Salman 78).

AFGHANISTAN

2017 Championship Final

Oct 27: Shaheen Asmayee 4
De Maiwand Atalan 3 (aet).

CHINA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gua'zhou E (C)	30	20	4	6	69	42	64
S'hai SIPG	30	17	7	6	72	39	58
Tianjin Q'jian	30	15	9	6	46	33	54
Hebei	30	15	7	8	55	38	52
Gua'zhou R&F	30	15	7	8	59	46	52
Shandong	30	13	10	7	49	33	49
Changchun	30	12	8	10	46	41	44
Guizhou	30	12	6	12	39	45	42
Beijing Guoan	30	11	7	12	42	42	40
Chongqing	30	9	9	12	37	40	36
S'hai Shenhua	30	9	8	13	52	55	35
Jiangsu	30	7	11	12	40	45	32
Tianjin Teda	30	8	7	15	30	49	31
Henan	30	7	9	14	34	46	30
Yanbian (R)	30	5	7	18	32	64	22
Liaoning (R)	30	4	6	20	30	74	18

INDONESIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bhay'kara (C)	34	22	2	10	61	40	68
Bali Utd	34	21	5	8	76	38	68
PSM	34	19	8	7	67	38	65
Persija	34	17	10	7	46	24	61
Madura Utd	34	17	9	8	58	44	60
Persipura	34	17	9	8	64	37	60
Barito Putera	34	15	8	11	48	44	53
Borneo	34	15	7	12	50	39	52
Arema	34	13	10	11	43	44	49
Mitra Kukar	34	13	4	17	49	74	43
Sriwijaya	34	11	9	14	50	50	42
PS TNI	34	12	6	16	46	58	42
Persib	34	9	14	11	39	34	41
Persela	34	12	4	18	49	55	40
Perseru	34	10	7	17	35	45	37
Semen P'ng (R)	34	9	8	17	34	52	35
Persiba (R)	34	7	6	21	41	62	27
P Gresik (R)	34	2	4	28	26	104	10

KYRGYZSTAN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alay (C)	20	13	2	5	51	25	41
Abdish-Ata	20	12	2	6	35	19	38
Dordoi	20	10	5	5	34	18	35
Neftchi	20	6	5	9	18	26	23
Alga	20	5	6	9	19	32	21
Kara-Balta	20	3	2	15	20	57	11

MALAYSIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Johor DT (C)	22	15	4	3	50	19	49
Pahang	22	12	4	6	44	26	40
Felda United	22	11	6	5	40	26	39
Kedah	22	9	8	5	45	33	35
Perak	22	9	7	6	30	31	34
Selangor	22	9	6	7	32	28	33
PKNS	22	6	7	9	33	38	25
Melaka United	22	6	6	10	33	46	24
T-Team[1]	22	7	5	10	30	45	23
Kelantan[1]	22	7	4	11	31	39	22
Sarawak (R)	22	5	6	11	24	34	21
Penang (R)	22	3	3	16	16	43	12

[1]*3pts deducted for failing to register players on time*

MYANMAR

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shan Utd (C)	22	17	3	2	37	8	54
Yangon Utd	22	16	4	2	45	11	52
Yadanarbon	22	14	5	3	50	27	47
Ayeyawady	22	10	6	6	36	24	36
Rakhine Utd	22	9	7	6	25	26	34
Magwe	22	7	9	6	25	23	30
Zwekapin	22	8	2	12	20	32	26
Sthn My'mar	22	5	8	9	19	25	23
Hantharwady	22	5	8	9	30	38	23
Gospel For Asia	22	4	5	13	20	33	17
Nay Pyi Taw (R)	22	3	3	16	16	49	12
Chin Utd (R)	22	3	2	17	21	48	11

SINGAPORE

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Albirex (C)	24	20	2	2	70	16	62
Tampines Rvrs	24	17	3	4	48	20	54
Home United	24	15	5	4	58	26	50
Geylang Intl	24	11	3	10	32	37	36
Warriors	24	9	7	8	33	36	34
Hougang Utd	24	9	3	12	24	31	30
Balestier K'sa	24	5	4	15	17	33	19
Brunei DPMM	24	5	2	17	30	61	17
Young Lions	24	1	3	20	10	62	6

SOUTH KOREA

Division split after 33-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular-season record

2017 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk (C)	38	22	9	7	73	35	75
Jeju	38	19	9	10	60	37	66
Suwon B'wings	38	17	13	8	63	41	64
Ulsan	38	17	11	10	42	45	62
Seoul	38	16	13	9	56	42	61
Gangwon	38	13	10	15	59	65	49

2017 – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pohang	38	15	7	16	64	60	52
Daegu	38	11	14	13	50	52	47
Incheon	38	7	18	13	32	53	39
Jeonnam	38	8	11	19	53	69	35
Sangju[1]	38	8	11	19	41	66	35
Gwangju (R)	38	6	12	20	33	61	30

[1]*Enter rel/prom play-off*

THAILAND

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buriram Utd (C)	34	27	5	2	85	22	86
Muangthong	34	22	6	6	79	29	72
Bangkok Utd	34	21	3	10	97	57	66
Chiangrai Utd	34	18	6	10	67	42	60
Bangkok Glass	34	16	8	10	63	44	56
Ratchaburi	34	16	7	11	63	49	55
Chonburi	34	15	8	11	59	59	53
Pattaya Utd	34	15	6	13	60	53	51
Port	34	14	8	12	60	63	50
Ubon UMT	34	12	11	11	55	54	47
Suphanburi	34	11	10	13	52	58	43
Nakhon R'sima	34	10	11	13	42	48	41
Navy	34	10	10	14	42	50	40
Tero Sasana	34	10	9	15	42	57	39
Sukhothai	34	8	12	14	54	66	36
Thai Honda (R)	34	8	4	22	43	68	28
Sisaket (R)	34	6	5	23	43	90	23
Sa't Prakan (R)	34	1	3	30	31	128	6

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions; (R) = relegated;
(QF) = qualified for finals;
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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SPAIN: LA LIGA 2017-18

ALAVES

GOALKEEPERS
25 Ioritz **LANDETA** (22) 10.10.95
1 Fernando **PACHECO** (25) 18.05.92
13 Antonio **SIVERA** (21) 11.08.96

DEFENDERS
4 **ALEXIS** (32) 04.08.85
3 Ruben **DUARTE** (22) 18.10.95
12 Rodrigo **ELY** (Bra) (24) 03.11.93
27 Einar **GALILEA** (22) 22.05.95
21 **HECTOR** (26) 23.05.91
5 Victor **LAGUARDIA** (28) 05.11.89
6 Guillermo **MARIPAN** (Chl) (23) 06.05.94
2 Carlos **VIGARAY** (23) 07.09.94

MIDFIELDERS
14 **BURGUI** (24) 29.10.93
21 Enzo **FERNANDEZ** (Fra) (22) 24.03.95
19 Manu **GARCIA** (31) 26.04.86
11 **IBAI** (28) 11.11.89
8 Aleksandar **KATAI** (Ser) (26) 06.02.91
23 Alvaro **MEDRAN** (23) 15.03.94
17 Alfonso **PEDRAZA** (21) 09.04.96
18 Tomas **PINA** (30) 14.10.87
10 Oscar **ROMERO** (Par) (25) 04.07.92
16 Daniel **TORRES** (Col) (28) 15.11.89
22 Mubarak **WAKASO** (Gha) (27) 25.07.90

FORWARDS
15 **BOJAN** Krkic (27) 28.08.90
24 **MUNIR** (22) 01.09.95
9 Christian **SANTOS** (Ven) (29) 24.03.88
7 Ruben **SOBRINO** (25) 01.06.92

COACH
Gianni **DE BIASI** (Ita) (61) 16.06.56

ATHLETIC BILBAO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Kepa **ARRIZABALAGA** (23) 03.10.94
13 Iago **HERRERIN** (29) 25.01.88
32 Unai **SIMON** (20) 11.06.97

DEFENDERS
5 Yerai **ALVAREZ** (22) 24.01.95
24 Mikel **BALENZIAGA** (29) 29.02.88
2 Eneko **BOVEDA** (28) 14.12.88
18 Oscar **DE MARCOS** (28) 14.04.89
16 Xabier **ETXEITA** (30) 31.10.87
4 Aymeric **LAPORTE** (Fra) (23) 27.05.94
15 Inigo **LEKUE** (24) 04.05.93
30 Unai **NUNEZ** (20) 30.01.97
3 Enric **SABORIT** (25) 27.04.92

MIDFIELDERS
23 Ager **AKETXE** (23) 30.12.93
7 **BENAT** (30) 19.02.87
28 Inigo **CORDOBA** (20) 13.03.97
22 Raul **GARCIA** (31) 11.07.86
8 Ander **ITURRASPE** (28) 08.03.89
17 Mikel **RICO** (33) 01.11.84
6 Mikel **SAN JOSE** (28) 30.05.89
14 Markel **SUSAETA** (29) 14.12.87
21 Mikel **VESGA** (24) 21.05.93

FORWARDS
20 Aritz **ADURIZ** (36) 11.02.81
19 Sabin **MERINO** (25) 04.01.92
10 Iker **MUNIAIN** (24) 19.12.92
9 Kike **SOLA** (31) 25.02.86
11 Inaki **WILLIAMS** (23) 15.06.94

COACH
Jose Angel **ZIGANDA** (51) 01.10.66

ATLETICO MADRID

GOALKEEPERS
1 Miguel Angel **MOYA** (33) 02.04.84
13 Jan **OBLAK** (Sln) (24) 07.01.93
25 Axel **WERNER** (Arg) (21) 28.02.96

DEFENDERS
3 **FILIPE LUIS** (Bra) (32) 09.08.85
24 Jose **GIMENEZ** (Uru) (22) 20.01.95
29 Sergi **GONZALEZ** (22) 26.05.95
2 Diego **GODIN** (Uru) (31) 16.02.86
19 Lucas **HERNANDEZ** (Fra) (21) 14.02.96
20 **JUANFRAN** (32) 09.01.85
15 Stefan **SAVIC** (Mne) (26) 08.01.91
16 Sime **VRSALJKO** (Cro) (25) 10.01.92

MIDFIELDERS
12 Augusto **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (31) 10.04.86
10 Yannick **FERREIRA CARRASCO** (Blg) (24) 04.09.93
14 **GABI** (34) 10.07.83
22 Nicolas **GAITAN** (Arg) (29) 23.02.88
6 **KOKE** (25) 08.01.92
33 Antonio **MOYA** (19) 20.03.98
5 Thomas **PARTEY** (Gha) (24) 13.07.93
8 **SAUL** Niguez (23) 21.11.94

FORWARDS
11 Angel **CORREA** (Arg) (22) 09.03.95
21 Kevin **GAMEIRO** (Fra) (30) 09.04.87
7 Antoine **GRIEZMANN** (Fra) (26) 21.03.91
9 Fernando **TORRES** (33) 20.03.84
17 Luciano **VIETTO** (Arg) (23) 05.12.93

COACH
Diego **SIMEONE** (Arg) (47) 28.04.70

BARCELONA

GOALKEEPERS
13 Jasper **CILLESSEN** (Hol) (28) 22.04.89
1 Marc-Andre **TER STEGEN** (Ger) (25) 30.04.92

DEFENDERS
18 Jordi **ALBA** (28) 21.03.89
19 Lucas **DIGNE** (Fra) (24) 20.07.93
14 Javier **MASCHERANO** (Arg) (33) 08.06.84
3 Gerard **PIQUE** (30) 02.02.87
2 Nelson **SEMEDO** (Por) (23) 16.11.93
23 Samuel **UMTITI** (Fra) (23) 14.11.93
25 Thomas **VERMAELEN** (Blg) (31) 14.11.85
22 Aleix **VIDAL** (28) 21.08.89

MIDFIELDERS
7 **ARDA** Turan (Tur) (30) 30.01.87
5 Sergio **BUSQUETS** (29) 16.07.88
21 Andre **GOMES** (Por) (24) 30.07.93
8 Andres **INIESTA** (33) 11.05.84
15 **PAULINHO** (Bra) (29) 25.07.88
12 **RAFINHA** (Bra) (24) 12.02.93
4 Ivan **RAKITIC** (Cro) (29) 10.03.88
20 Sergi **ROBERTO** (25) 07.02.92
6 Denis **SUAREZ** (23) 06.01.94

FORWARDS
17 Paco **ALCACER** (24) 30.08.93
16 Gerard **DEULOFEU** (23) 13.03.94
11 Ousmane **DEMBELE** (Fra) (20) 15.05.97
10 Lionel **MESSI** (Arg) (30) 24.06.87
9 Luis **SUAREZ** (Uru) (30) 24.01.87

COACH
Ernesto **VALVERDE** (53) 09.02.64

CELTA VIGO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sergio **ALVAREZ** (31) 03.08.86
13 Ruben **BLANCO** (22) 25.07.95
25 Ivan **VILLAR** (20) 09.07.97

DEFENDERS
22 Gustavo **CABRAL** (Arg) (32) 14.10.85
3 Andreu **FONTAS** (27) 14.11.89
20 Sergi **GOMEZ** (25) 28.07.92
19 **JONNY** (23) 03.03.94
2 Hugo **MALLO** (26) 22.06.91
30 Diego **PAMPIN** (17) 15.03.00
24 Facundo **RONCAGLIA** (Arg) (30) 10.02.87

MIDFIELDERS
8 Pablo **HERNANDEZ** (Chl) (31) 24.10.86
17 Andrew **HJULSAGER** (Den) (22) 15.01.95
16 **JOZABED** (26) 08.03.91
14 Stanislav **LOBOTKA** (Slk) (22) 25.11.94
26 Brais **MENDEZ** (20) 07.01.97
6 Nemanja **RADOJA** (Ser) (24) 06.02.93
18 Daniel **WASS** (Den) (28) 31.05.89

FORWARDS
10 Iago **ASPAS** (30) 11.08.87
7 Maxi **GOMEZ** (Uru) (21) 14.08.96
9 John **GUIDETTI** (Swe) (25) 15.04.92
21 Emre **MOR** (Tur) (20) 24.07.97
11 Pione **SISTO** (Den) (22) 04.02.95

COACH
Juan Carlos **UNZUE** (50) 22.04.67

DEP LA CORUNA

GOALKEEPERS
25 Costel **PANTILIMON** (Rom) (30) 01.02.87
13 **RUBEN** (33) 22.06.84
1 Przemyslaw **TYTON** (Pol) (30) 04.01.87

DEFENDERS
6 Raul **ALBENTOSA** (29) 07.09.88
14 Alejandro **ARRIBAS** (28) 01.05.89
2 **JUANFRAN** (29) 11.09.88
16 **LUISINHO** (Por) (32) 05.05.85
3 Fernando **NAVARRO** (35) 25.06.82
4 **SAUL** (23) 09.11.94
24 Fabian **SCHAR** (Swi) (25) 20.12.91
12 **SIDNEI** (Bra) (28) 23.08.89
23 Gerard **VALENTIN** (24) 28.07.93

MIDFIELDERS
18 Zakaria **BAKKALI** (Blg) (21) 26.01.96
22 Celso **BORGES** (CR) (29) 27.05.88
9 Fede **CARTABIA** (Arg) (24) 20.01.93
8 Emre **COLAK** (Tur) (26) 20.05.91
27 Edu **EXPOSITO** (21) 01.08.96
21 Bruno **GAMA** (Por) (30) 15.11.87
11 Carles **GIL** (25) 22.11.92
20 **GUILHERME** (Bra) (26) 05.04.91
5 Pedro **MOSQUERA** (29) 21.04.88
19 Borja **VALLE** (25) 09.07.92
17 Federico **VALVERDE** (Uru) (19) 22.07.98

FORWARDS
10 Florin **ANDONE** (Rom) (24) 11.04.93
15 Adrian **LOPEZ** (29) 08.01.88
7 Lucas **PEREZ** (29) 10.09.88

COACH
Cristobal **PARRALO** (50) 21.08.67

EIBAR

GOALKEEPERS
25 Marko **DMITROVIC** (Ser) (25) 24.01.92
13 Asier **RIESGO** (34) 06.10.83
1 **YOEL** (29) 28.08.88

DEFENDERS
18 Anaitz **ARBILLA** (30) 15.05.87
15 Jose **ANGEL** (28) 05.09.89
7 Ander **CAPA** (25) 14.05.92
3 Alejandro **GALVEZ** (28) 06.06.89
23 David **JUNCA** (24) 16.11.93
22 David **LOMBAN** (30) 05.06.87
12 Paulo **OLIVEIRA** (Por) (25) 08.01.92
4 Ivan **RAMIS** (33) 25.10.84

MIDFIELDERS
20 Ivan **ALEJO** (22) 10.02.95
5 Gonzalo **ESCALANTE** (Arg) (24) 27.03.93
14 Dani **GARCIA** (27) 24.05.90
8 Takashi **INUI** (Jap) (29) 02.06.88
24 Joan **JORDAN** (23) 06.07.94
21 Pedro **LEON** (31) 24.11.86
11 Ruben **PENA** (26) 18.07.91
6 Cristian **RIVERA** (20) 09.07.97
16 Fran **RICO** (30) 03.08.87

FORWARDS
10 **BEBE** (Por) (27) 12.07.90
19 **CHARLES** (Bra) (33) 04.04.84
9 Sergi **ENRICH** (27) 26.02.90
17 **KIKE** (28) 25.11.89

COACH
Jose Luis **MENDILIBAR** (56) 14.03.61

ESPANYOL

GOALKEEPERS
13 Diego **LOPEZ** (36) 03.11.81
1 Pau **LOPEZ** (22) 13.12.94
35 Adrian **LOPEZ** (18) 09.01.99

DEFENDERS
6 Oscar **DUARTE** (CR) (28) 03.06.89
22 Mario **HERMOSO** (22) 18.06.95
16 Javi **LOPEZ** (31) 21.01.86
3 Aaron **MARTIN** (20) 22.04.97
5 **NALDO** (Bra) (29) 28.08.88
2 Marc **NAVARRO** (22) 02.07.95
24 Sergio **SANCHEZ** (31) 03.04.86
12 Didac **VILA** (28) 09.06.89

MIDFIELDERS
25 Sergi **DARDER** (23) 22.12.93
20 Pape **DIOP** (Sen) (31) 19.03.86
18 Javi **FUEGO** (33) 04.01.84
23 Esteban **GRANERO** (30) 02.07.87
10 Jose Manuel **JURADO** (31) 29.06.86
15 David **LOPEZ** (28) 09.10.89
14 Oscar **MELENDO** (20) 23.08.97
17 Hernan **PEREZ** (Par) (28) 25.02.89
19 Pablo **PIATTI** (Arg) (28) 31.03.89
21 Marc **ROCA** (21) 26.11.96
4 Victor **SANCHEZ** (30) 08.09.87

FORWARDS
11 Leo **BAPTISTAO** (Bra) (25) 26.08.92
9 Sergio **GARCIA** (34) 09.06.83
7 Gerard **MORENO** (25) 07.04.92
8 Alvaro **VAZQUEZ** (26) 27.04.91

COACH
Quique **FLORES** (52) 05.02.65

GETAFE

GOALKEEPERS
13 Vicente **GUAITA** (30) 18.02.87
25 Filip **MANOJLOVIC** (Ser) (21) 25.04.96
1 Emiliano **MARTINEZ** (Arg) (25) 02.09.92

DEFENDERS
3 Vitorino **ANTUNES** (Por) (30) 01.04.87
4 **BRUNO** (27) 24.05.90
16 **CALA** (28) 26.11.89
2 Djene **DAKONAM** (Tog) (26) 31.12.91
6 Nicolas **GOROSITO** (Arg) (29) 17.08.88
15 Francisco **MOLINERO** (32) 26.07.85
17 Mathias **OLIVERA** (Uru) (20) 31.10.97
22 Damian **SUAREZ** (Uru) (29) 27.04.88

MIDFIELDERS
18 Mauro **ARAMBARRI** (Uru) (22) 30.09.95
28 **BARRI** (22) 19.09.95
5 Markel **BERGARA** (31) 05.05.86
21 Faycal **FAJR** (Mor) (29) 01.08.88
8 Mehdi **LACEN** (Alg) (33) 15.03.84
24 Jefferson **MONTERO** (Ecu) (28) 01.09.89
14 Sergio **MORA** (38) 30.08.79
20 Dani **PACHECO** (26) 05.01.91
12 Francisco **PORTILLO** (27) 13.06.90
10 Gaku **SHIBASAKI** (Jap) (25) 28.05.92

FORWARDS
9 **ANGEL** (30) 26.04.87
11 **CHULI** (26) 25.01.91
7 Alvaro **JIMENEZ** (22) 19.05.95
19 Jorge **MOLINA** (35) 22.04.82
23 Amath **NDIAYE** (Sen) (21) 16.07.96

COACH
Jose **BORDALAS** (53) 05.03.64

GIRONA

GOALKEEPERS
13 Yassine **BOUNOU** (Mor) (26) 05.04.91
1 Gorka **IRAIZOZ** (36) 06.03.81

DEFENDERS
5 Pedro **ALCALA** (28) 19.03.89
2 Bernardo **ESPINOSA** (Col) (28) 11.07.89
15 **JUANPE** (26) 30.04.91
25 Pablo **MAFFEO** (20) 12.07.97
3 Johan **MOJICA** (Col) (25) 21.08.92
20 Marc **MUNIESA** (25) 27.03.92
21 Carles **PLANAS** (26) 04.03.91
4 Jonas **RAMALHO** (24) 10.06.93

MIDFIELDERS
11 **ADAY** (29) 16.12.87
10 Eloi **AMAGAT** (32) 21.05.85
19 Farid **BOULAYA** (Fra) (24) 25.02.93
12 Douglas **LUIZ** (Bra) (19) 09.05.98
23 Aleix **GARCIA** (20) 28.06.97
24 Borja **GARCIA** (27) 02.11.90
6 Alex **GRANELL** (29) 02.08.88
8 Pere **PONS** (24) 11.12.93
9 **PORTU** (25) 21.05.92
16 David **TIMOR** (28) 17.10.89

FORWARDS
18 Olarenwaju **KAYODE** (Nga) (24) 08.03.93
14 Michael **OLUNGA** (Ken) (23) 26.03.94
17 Marlos **MORENO** (Col) (21) 20.09.96
7 Christian **STUANI** (Uru) (31) 12.10.86

COACH
Pablo **MACHIN** (42) 07.04.75

LAS PALMAS

GOALKEEPERS
13 Leandro **CHICHIZOLA** (Arg) (27) 27.03.90
1 Raul **LIZOAIN** (26) 27.01.91

DEFENDERS
16 **AYTHAMI** (31) 27.08.86
17 Pedro **BIGAS** (27) 15.05.90
23 Dani **CASTELLANO** (30) 02.11.87
5 David **GARCIA** (35) 25.02.82
15 Borja **HERRERA** (24) 08.01.93
3 Mauricio **LEMOS** (Uru) (21) 28.12.95
12 **MICHEL** (Bra) (27) 15.02.90
22 Ximo **NAVARRO** (27) 23.01.90
2 David **SIMON** (27) 31.12.89

MIDFIELDERS
25 Alberto **AQUILANI** (Ita) (33) 07.07.84
18 Javi **CASTELLANO** (29) 02.11.87
4 Vicente **GOMEZ** (29) 31.08.88
27 Fabio **GONZALEZ** (20) 12.02.97
8 Alen **HALILOVIC** (Cro) (21) 18.06.96
14 **HERNAN** (27) 26.08.90
11 **MOMO** (35) 15.07.82
28 Benito **RAMIREZ** (22) 11.07.95
6 Sergi **SAMPER** (22) 20.01.95
21 Jonathan **VIERA** (28) 21.10.89
20 **VITOLO** (28) 02.11.89

FORWARDS
9 Jonathan **CALLERI** (Arg) (24) 23.09.93
7 Loic **REMY** (Fra) (30) 02.01.87
24 **TANA** (27) 20.09.90
10 Oussama **TANNANE** (Mor) (23) 23.03.94
19 Hernan **TOLEDO** (Arg) (21) 17.01.96

COACH
Pako **AYESTARAN** (54) 05.02.63

LEGANES

GOALKEEPERS
13 Nereo **CHAMPAGNE** (Arg) (32) 20.01.85
1 Ivan **CUELLAR** (33) 27.05.84

DEFENDERS
3 Unai **BUSTINZA** (25) 02.02.92
16 Mauro **DOS SANTOS** (Arg) (28) 07.07.89
14 Raul **GARCIA** (28) 30.11.89
5 Martin **MANTOVANI** (Arg) (33) 07.07.84
19 Ezequiel **MUNOZ** (Arg) (27) 08.10.90
15 Diego **RICO** (24) 23.02.93
22 Dimitris **SIOVAS** (Gre) (29) 16.09.88
2 **TITO** (32) 11.07.85
20 Joseba **ZALDUA** (25) 24.06.92

MIDFIELDERS
24 Darko **BRASANAC** (Ser) (25) 12.02.92
10 Nabil **EL ZHAR** (Mor) (31) 27.08.86
17 Javier **ERASO** (27) 22.03.90
8 **GABRIEL** (Bra) (24) 18.09.93
6 Gerard **GUMBAU** (22) 18.12.94
4 Erik **MORAN** (26) 25.05.91
21 Ruben **PEREZ** (28) 26.04.89
23 Omar **RAMOS** (29) 26.01.88
11 Alexander **SZYMANOWSKI** (Arg) (29) 13.10.88

FORWARDS
25 Nordin **AMRABAT** (Mor) (30) 31.03.87
12 Claudio **BEAUVUE** (Gdp) (29) 16.04.88
9 Miguel Angel **GUERRERO** (27) 12.07.90
7 Mamadou **KONE** (IvC) (25) 25.12.91
18 Jose **NARANJO** (23) 28.07.94
27 Leonardo **ROCHA** (Por) (20) 23.05.97

COACH
Asier **GARITANO** (47) 06.12.69

LEVANTE

GOALKEEPERS
25 Mitchell **LANGERAK** (Aus) (29) 22.08.88
13 Oier **OLAZABAL** (28) 14.09.89
1 **RAUL** (29) 13.03.88

DEFENDERS
18 Erick **CABACO** (Uru) (22) 19.04.95
6 **CHEMA** (25) 03.03.92
2 Ivan **LOPEZ** (24) 23.08.93
19 Pedro **LOPEZ** (34) 01.11.83
22 Antonio **LUNA** (26) 17.03.91
26 Shaq **MOORE** (USA) (21) 02.11.96
15 Sergio **POSTIGO** (29) 04.11.88
4 **ROBER** (22) 16.02.95
3 **TONO** (28) 07.11.89

MIDFIELDERS
10 Enis **BARDHI** (Mac) (22) 02.07.95
24 Jose **CAMPANA** (24) 30.05.93
5 Cheick **DOUKOURE** (IvC) (25) 11.09.92
8 Jefferson **LERMA** (Col) (23) 25.10.94
11 Jose **LUIS** Morales (30) 23.07.87
20 Sasa **LUKIC** (Ser) (21) 13.08.96
7 **SAMU** (27) 13.07.90

FORWARDS
17 Alex **ALEGRIA** (25) 10.10.92
21 Emmanuel **BOATENG** (Gha) (21) 23.05.96
14 **IVI** (23) 29.06.94
23 **JASON** (23) 06.07.94
16 **NANO** (22) 05.02.95
9 **ROGER** (26) 03.01.91

COACH
Juan **MUNIZ** (49) 02.11.68

MALAGA

GOALKEEPERS
13 Cenk **GONEN** (Tur) (29) 21.02.88
25 Andres **PRIETO** (24) 17.10.93
1 **ROBERTO** (31) 10.02.86

DEFENDERS
22 Paul **BAYSSE** (Fra) (29) 18.05.88
7 Juan **CARLOS** (27) 30.03.90
12 **CIFU** (27) 05.10.90
3 Diego **GONZALEZ** (22) 28.01.95
4 Luis **HERNANDEZ** (28) 14.04.89
29 Ian **PINO** (21) 23.01.96
15 Federico **RICCA** (Uru) (23) 01.12.94
18 Roberto **ROSALES** (Ven) (29) 20.11.88
23 Miguel **TORRES** (31) 28.01.86

MIDFIELDERS
8 **ADRIAN** (29) 25.05.88
31 Jose **CARLOS** (19) 24.08.98
11 Gonzalo **CASTRO** (Uru) (33) 14.09.84
19 Emanuel **CECCHINI** (Arg) (20) 24.12.96
21 **JONY** (26) 09.07.91
10 **JUANPI** (Ven) (23) 24.01.94
20 **KEKO** (25) 27.12.91
6 Zdravko **KUZMANOVIC** (Ser) (30) 22.09.87
28 Alex **MULA** (21) 23.07.96
17 Javi **ONTIVEROS** (20) 09.09.97
14 **RECIO** (26) 11.01.91
5 Esteban **ROLON** (Arg) (22) 25.03.95

FORWARDS
9 Borja **BASTON** (25) 25.08.92
26 Yousseff **EN NESYRI** (Mor) (20) 01.06.97
16 Adalberto **PENARANDA** (Ven) (20) 31.05.97
24 Diego **ROLAN** (Uru) (24) 24.03.93

COACH
MICHEL (54) 23.03.63

REAL BETIS

GOALKEEPERS
13 Antonio **ADAN** (30) 13.05.87
1 Dani **GIMENEZ** (34) 30.07.83

DEFENDERS
5 Jordi **AMAT** (25) 21.03.92
19 Antonio **BARRAGAN** (30) 12.06.87
14 Riza **DURMISI** (Den) (23) 08.01.94
4 Zou **FEDDAL** (Mor) (28) 01.01.89
23 Aissa **MANDI** (Alg) (26) 22.10.91
2 Rafa **NAVARRO** (23) 23.02.94
21 Alin **TOSCA** (Rom) (25) 14.03.92

MIDFIELDERS
10 Ryad **BOUDEBOUZ** (Alg) (27) 19.02.90
8 Victor **CAMARASA** (23) 28.05.94
18 Andres **GUARDADO** (Mex) (31) 28.09.86
3 Javi **GARCIA** (30) 08.02.87
35 Julio **GRACIA** (19) 10.02.98
17 **JOAQUIN** (36) 21.07.81
11 Matias **NAHUEL** (21) 22.10.96
6 Fabian **RUIZ** (21) 03.04.96

FORWARDS
12 Joel **CAMPBELL** (CR) (25) 26.06.92
27 Francis **GUERRERO** (21) 11.03.96
7 Sergio **LEON** (28) 06.01.89
29 Juanjo **NARVAEZ** (Col) (22) 12.02.95
9 Antonio **SANABRIA** (Par) (21) 04.03.96
20 Cristian **TELLO** (26) 11.08.91

COACH
Quique **SETIEN** (59) 27.09.58

REAL MADRID

GOALKEEPERS
13 Kiko **CASILLA** (31) 02.10.86
1 Keylor **NAVAS** (CR) (30) 15.12.86
30 Luca **ZIDANE** (Fra) (19) 13.05.98

DEFENDERS
2 Daniel **CARVAJAL** (25) 11.01.92
19 Achraf **HAKIMI** (Mor) (19) 04.11.98
15 Theo **HERNANDEZ** (Fra) (20) 06.10.97
12 **MARCELO** (Bra) (29) 12.05.88
6 **NACHO** (27) 18.01.90
4 Sergio **RAMOS** (31) 30.03.86
27 Alvaro **TEJERO** (21) 20.07.96
3 Jesus **VALLEJO** (20) 05.01.97
5 Raphael **VARANE** (Fra) (24) 25.04.93

MIDFIELDERS
20 Marco **ASENSIO** (21) 21.01.96
14 **CASEMIRO** (Bra) (25) 23.02.92
24 Dani **CEBALLOS** (21) 07.08.96
29 Francisco **FEUILLASSIER** (Arg) (19) 12.05.98
22 **ISCO** (25) 21.04.92
23 Mateo **KOVACIC** (Cro) (23) 06.05.94
8 Toni **KROOS** (Ger) (27) 04.01.90
18 Marcos **LLORENTE** (22) 30.01.95
10 Luka **MODRIC** (Cro) (32) 09.09.85
17 Lucas **VAZQUEZ** (26) 01.07.91

FORWARDS
11 Gareth **BALE** (Wal) (28) 16.07.89
9 Karim **BENZEMA** (Fra) (29) 19.12.87
21 Borja **MAYORAL** (20) 05.04.97
7 Cristiano **RONALDO** (Por) (32) 05.02.85

COACH
Zinedine **ZIDANE** (Fra) (43) 23.06.72

REAL SOCIEDAD

GOALKEEPERS
13 Tono **RAMIREZ** (30) 23.11.86
1 Geronimo **RULLI** (Arg) (25) 20.05.92

DEFENDERS
24 Alberto **DE LA BELLA** (31) 02.12.85
15 Aritz **ELUSTONDO** (23) 11.01.94
27 Andoni **GOROSABEL** (21) 04.08.96
3 Diego **LLORENTE** (24) 16.08.93
2 Carlos **MARTINEZ** (31) 09.04.86
6 Inigo **MARTINEZ** (26) 17.05.91
22 Raul **NAVAS** (29) 11.05.88
19 Alvaro **ODRIOZOLA** (21) 14.12.95
20 Kevin **RODRIGUES** (Por) (23) 05.03.94

MIDFIELDERS
16 Sergio **CANALES** (26) 16.02.91
29 Ander **GUEVARA** (20) 07.07.97
4 Asier **ILLARRAMENDI** (27) 08.03.90
8 Adnan **JANUZAJ** (Blg) (22) 05.02.95
10 Xabi **PRIETO** (34) 29.08.83
14 Ruben **PARDO** (25) 22.10.92
5 Igor **ZUBELDIA** (20) 30.03.97
17 David **ZURUTUZA** (31) 19.07.86

FORWARDS
9 Imanol **AGIRRETXE** (30) 24.02.87
21 Jon **BAUTISTA** (22) 03.07.95
12 Willian **JOSE** (Bra) (26) 23.11.91
7 **JUANMI** (24) 20.05.93
18 Mikel **OYARZABAL** (20) 21.04.97
11 Carlos **VELA** (Mex) (28) 01.03.89

COACH
Eusebio **SACRISTAN** (53) 13.04.64

SEVILLA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sergio **RICO** (24) 01.09.93
13 David **SORIA** (24) 04.04.93
32 Juan **SORIANO** (20) 23.08.97

DEFENDERS
3 Lionel **CAROLE** (26) 12.04.91
6 Daniel **CARRICO** (Por) (29) 04.08.88
2 Sebastien **CORCHIA** (Fra) (27) 01.11.90
18 Sergio **ESCUDERO** (28) 02.09.89
4 Simon **KJAER** (Den) (28) 26.03.89
5 Clement **LENGLET** (22) 17.06.95
25 Gabriel **MERCADO** (Arg) (30) 18.03.87
21 Nicolas **PAREJA** (Arg) (33) 19.01.84

MIDFIELDERS
10 Ever **BANEGA** (Arg) (29) 29.06.88
11 Joaquin **CORREA** (Arg) (23) 13.08.94
19 Paulo Henrique **GANSO** (Bra) (28) 12.10.89
12 Johannes **GEIS** (Ger) (24) 17.08.93
7 Michael **KROHN-DEHLI** (Den) (34) 06.06.83
23 Borja **LASSO** (23) 01.01.94
8 Walter **MONTOYA** (Arg) (24) 21.07.93
16 Jesus **NAVAS** (32) 21.11.85
15 Steven **N'ZONZI** (Fra) (28) 15.12.88
14 Guido **PIZARRO** (Arg) (27) 26.02.90
17 Pablo **SARABIA** (25) 11.05.92
22 Franco **VAZQUEZ** (Ita) (28) 22.02.89

FORWARDS
9 Wissam **BEN YEDDER** (Fra) (27) 12.08.90
20 Luis **MURIEL** (Col) (26) 16.04.91
24 **NOLITO** (31) 15.10.86

COACH
Eduardo **BERIZZO** (Arg) (48) 13.11.69

VALENCIA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Jaume **DOMENECH** (27) 05.11.90
13 **NETO** (Bra) (28) 19.07.89

DEFENDERS
5 **GABRIEL PAULISTA** (Bra) (27) 26.11.90
24 Ezequiel **GARAY** (Arg) (31) 10.10.86
14 Jose Luis **GAYA** (22) 25.05.95
29 Javi **JIMENEZ** (20) 11.03.97
26 Toni **LATO** (20) 21.11.97
21 Martin **MONTOYA** (26) 14.04.91
4 Jeison **MURILLO** (Col) (25) 27.05.92
3 Ruben **VEZO** (Por) (23) 25.04.94
30 Nacho **VIDAL** (22) 24.01.95

MIDFIELDERS
31 Nacho **GIL** (22) 09.09.95
7 Goncalo **GUEDES** (Por) (21) 29.11.96
20 Robert **IBANEZ** (24) 22.03.93
16 Geoffrey **KONDOGBIA** (Fra) (24) 15.02.93
6 Nemanja **MAKSIMOVIC** (Ser) (22) 26.01.95
15 Fabian **ORELLANA** (Chl) (31) 27.01.86
10 Dani **PAREJO** (28) 16.04.89
11 Andreas **PEREIRA** (Bra) (21) 01.01.96
18 Carlos **SOLER** (20) 02.01.97

FORWARDS
22 Santi **MINA** (21) 07.12.95
19 **RODRIGO** (26) 06.03.91
9 Simone **ZAZA** (Ita) (26) 25.06.91

COACH
MARCELINO (52) 14.08.65

VILLARREAL

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sergio **ASENJO** (28) 28.06.89
25 Mariano **BARBOSA** (Arg) (33) 27.07.84
31 Ander **CANTERO** (22) 09.01.95
13 Andres **FERNANDEZ** (30) 17.12.86

DEFENDERS
23 Daniele **BONERA** (Ita) (36) 31.05.81
11 Jaume **COSTA** (29) 18.03.88
2 Mario **GASPAR** (26) 24.11.90
3 Alvaro **GONZALEZ** (27) 08.01.90
5 Adrian **MARIN** (20) 09.01.97
6 Victor **RUIZ** (28) 25.01.89
22 Antonio **RUKAVINA** (Ser) (33) 26.01.84
4 Ruben **SEMEDO** (Por) (23) 04.04.94
30 Pau **TORRES** (20) 16.01.97

MIDFIELDERS
21 **BRUNO** (33) 12.06.84
10 Samu **CASTILLEJO** (22) 18.01.95
7 Denis **CHERYSHEV** (Rus) (26) 26.12.90
33 **CHUCA** (20) 10.06.97
8 Pablo **FORNALS** (21) 22.02.96
26 Ramiro **GUERRA** (Uru) (20) 21.03.97
16 Rodri **HERNANDEZ** (21) 22.06.96
20 Roberto **SORIANO** (Ita) (26) 08.02.91
35 Leonardo **SUAREZ** (Arg) (21) 30.03.96
14 Manu **TRIGUEROS** (25) 17.10.91

FORWARDS
9 Carlos **BACCA** (Col) (31) 08.09.86
17 Cedric **BAKAMBU** (DRC) (26) 11.04.91
34 Dario **POVEDA** (20) 13.03.97
18 Nicola **SANSONE** (Ita) (26) 10.09.91
15 Enes **UNAL** (Tur) (20) 10.05.97

COACH
Javier **CALLEJA** (39) 12.05.78

(ages as of 01.12.17)

World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

APRIL 14, 2009, LONDON: CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Chelsea 4 Liverpool 4

Two goals down from the first leg, Liverpool twice put themselves within a goal of achieving a remarkable comeback

Battle...Chelsea's Didier Drogba takes on Jamie Carragher (left) and Javier Mascherano

As these two Premier League sides met in the Champions League for a fifth successive season, Chelsea's 3-1 win away at Anfield in the opening leg of their quarter-final looked to have all but settled matters before the return.

However, two goals within half an hour put Liverpool – who were without their skipper Steven Gerrard through injury – on the brink of an astonishing turnaround at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea – who were also without their captain, John Terry, who was suspended – struggled to contain the visitors until Blues boss Guus Hiddink brought about a decisive change when he replaced Salomon Kalou with Nicolas Anelka after just over half an hour. The substitution proved inspired as the hosts scored three times after the break to seemingly kill off the tie once more.

Yet Liverpool still refused to give up hope and they regained the lead through Lucas and Dirk Kuyt.

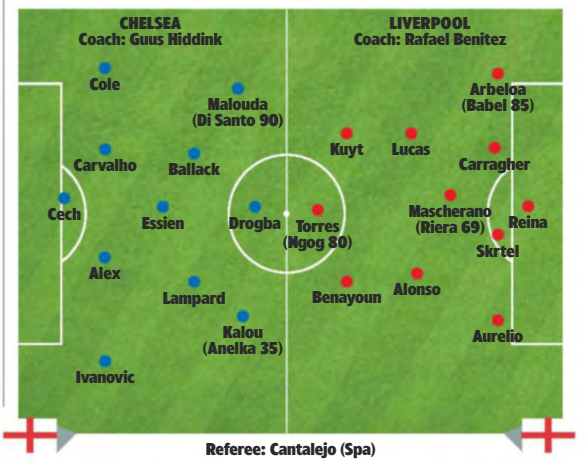
With eight minutes remaining, the Reds needed to score just once more to snatch a remarkable victory on away goals.

In the end, Frank Lampard finally killed off those dreams with the eighth goal of the night, in the last minute of normal time, as Chelsea secured their passage to the semi-finals.

Pressure...Chelsea keeper Petr Cech

Afterwards, Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez said: "Clearly when you lose you have to be disappointed but to lose in this way we can be really proud with our heads up."

Chelsea's run was to end at the last-four stage, beaten by Barcelona who went on to overcome Manchester United in the Final. WS



Referee: Cantalejo (Spa)

KEY MOMENTS

Deflection...Reina can't keep out Drogba

13min Yossi Benayoun sets up Fernando Torres, but the Liverpool striker wastes the chance as he fails to hit the target.

19min Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech is caught out of position and is beaten from 30 yards by Fabio Aurelio's low free-kick. **0-1**

28min Xabi Alonso picks himself up after being fouled by Branislav Ivanovic and scores from the penalty spot. **0-2**

35min Chelsea boss Hiddink withdraws Salomon Kalou and brings on substitute Nicolas Anelka.

Powerful...Alex equalises

52min Didier Drogba deflects a low cross from Anelka and keeper Pepe Reina can only help the ball into the net. **1-2**

57min Alex drives home a long-range free-kick. **2-2**

76 min Frank Lampard turns home Drogba's cross from close range. **3-2**

81min Lucas' shot is deflected beyond Cech. **3-3**

82min Dirk Kuyt heads home at the near post from substitute Albert Riera's cross. **3-4**

89min Lampard's shot hits both posts before crossing the line. **4-4**

Level...Frank Lampard's second goal

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